



# New York State Education Department

## ***Renewal Site Visit Report 2019-2020***

### **Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School**

**Visit Date: December 12 – 13, 2019  
Date of Report: March 4, 2020**

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## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

### Charter School Summary<sup>1</sup>

<b>Name of Charter School</b>	Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School
<b>Board Chair</b>	Selcuk Acar
<b>District of location</b>	Buffalo Public Schools
<b>Opening Date</b>	Fall 2004
<b>Charter Terms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Term: January 12, 2004 - January 11, 2009</li> <li>• First Renewal Term: January 12, 2009-June 30, 2012</li> <li>• Second Renewal Term: July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2015</li> <li>• Third Renewal Term: July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2020</li> </ul>
<b>Current Term Authorized Grades/ Approved Enrollment</b>	K- Grade 2; Grades 5-12/ 784 students
<b>Proposed Renewal Term Authorized Grades/ Proposed Approved Enrollment</b>	K -Grade 12/ 928 students
<b>Facilities</b>	190 Franklin Street Buffalo, New York 14202 - Private Space
<b>Mission Statement</b>	<i>Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School (BASCS) is a tuition-free, public charter K-12 school in Buffalo, NY whose mission is to fulfill the high demands of Grades k-12 students, their parents, and the community as a whole.</i>
<b>Key Design Elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>• STEM focus</li> <li>• Data-Driven Decision Making</li> <li>• Six-Point Plan to Higher Student Achievement</li> <li>• Intervention and Special Programs</li> <li>• Triad Partnership: Students-Parents-Teacher</li> <li>• College Counseling and Preparation</li> <li>• Role Modeling and Character Education</li> <li>• Multicultural Themes and Competence</li> <li>• Student Exchange and International Field Trips</li> </ul>
<b>Requested Revisions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To continue the previously planned elementary expansion and increase the current grade span to include Grades 3 and 4 from the school's current kindergarten through Grade 2 and Grade 5 through Grade 12 configuration;</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The information in this section was provided by the NYS Education Department Charter School Office.

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Increase authorized enrollment from 784 students to 928 students by year 5 of the renewal charter term.</b></li></ul> |
|--|--|

**Noteworthy:** Buffalo Academy of Sciences Charter School (BASCS) has instituted a restorative justice program which focuses on “the needs of students, repairing harm and developing relationships.” A problem-solving room at each site is staffed with a coordinator, and each building has a social worker and counselors in addition to the coordinator. Strategies employed to engage students include problem solving circles and restorative conversations.

### **Renewal Outcomes**

Pursuant to the Board of Regents Renewal Policy, the following are possible renewal outcomes:

- **Full-Term Renewal:** A school’s charter may be renewed for the maximum term of five years. For a school to be eligible for a full-term renewal, during the current charter term the school must have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or exceeding Benchmark 1, and at the time of the renewal analysis, have met substantially all other performance benchmarks in the Framework.
- **Short-Term Renewal:** A school’s charter may be renewed for a shorter term, typically of three years. As discussed above, the Regents will place an even greater emphasis on student performance for schools applying for their second or subsequent renewal, which is consistent with the greater time that a school has been in operation and the corresponding increase in the quantity and quality of student achievement data that the school has generated. In order for a school to be eligible for short-term renewal, a school must either:
  - (a) have compiled a mixed or limited record of meeting Benchmark 1, but at the time of the renewal analysis, have met substantially all of the other performance benchmarks in the Framework which will likely result in the school’s being able to meet Benchmark 1 with the additional time that short-term renewal permits, **or**
  - (b) have compiled an overall record of meeting Benchmark 1 but falls far below meeting one or more of the other performance benchmarks in the Framework.
- **Non-Renewal:** A school’s charter will not be renewed if the school does not apply for renewal or the school fails to meet the criteria for either full-term or short-term renewal. In the case of non-renewal, a school’s charter will be terminated upon its expiration and the school will be required to comply with the Charter School Office’s Closing Procedures to ensure an orderly closure by the end of the school year.

**Please Note:** The Regents may include additional terms, conditions, and/or requirements in a school’s Full-Term or Short-Term Renewal charter to address specific situations or areas of concern. For example, a school may meet the standards for full-term renewal or short-term renewal with regard to its educational success but may be required to address organizational deficiencies that need to be corrected but do not prevent the Regents from making the required legal findings for renewal. A school may also meet the standards for full-term renewal or short-term renewal of only a portion of its educational program (e.g., for the elementary school program, but not the middle school program). Such additional

terms and/or requirements may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on the number of students and grades to be served by the school, additional student performance metrics, heightened reporting requirements, or specific corrective action.

### SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

#### Current Grade Levels and Approved Enrollment

	<b>Year 1 2015 to 2016</b>	<b>Year 2 2016 to 2017</b>	<b>Year 3 2017 to 2018</b>	<b>Year 4 2018 to 2019</b>	<b>Year 5 2019 to 2020</b>
<b>Grade Configuration</b>	Grades 7-12	Grades 5, 7-12	K-Grades 5-12	K- Grades 1, 5-12	K- Grades 2, 5-12
<b>Total Approved Enrollment</b>	400	460	640	712	784

#### Proposed Renewal Term Grade Levels and Projected Enrollment Requested by the School<sup>2</sup>

	<b>Year 1 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Year 2 2021 to 2022</b>	<b>Year 3 2022 to 2023</b>	<b>Year 4 2023 to 2024</b>	<b>Year 5 2024 to 2025</b>
<b>Grade Configuration</b>	K -Grade 3, 5-12 12	K – Grade 12	K – Grade 12	K – Grade 12	K – Grade 12
<b>Total Proposed Enrollment</b>	856	928	928	928	928

## METHODOLOGY

A two-day renewal site visit was conducted at Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School on December 12, 2019 and December 13, 2019. The New York State Education Department’s Charter School Office (CSO) team conducted interviews with the school leaders, members of the board of trustees, and the special populations staff. In cooperation with school leadership, the CSO administered an anonymous online survey to teachers and parents.

<sup>2</sup> This proposed chart was submitted by the Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School in its renewal application. It is subject to change pending the final renewal recommendation and approval by the Board of Regents.

The team conducted 27 classroom observations in K- Grade 2 and Grades 5-12. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length and conducted jointly with various school academic leaders.

The documents and data reviewed by the team before, during, and after the site visit included the following:

- a. **Current organizational chart** showing all key staff positions, names of staff in those positions, and the school's reporting structure;
- b. **A master school schedule** showing each class, grade or course, and teacher(s). Note what days are A, B, C days and which classrooms include ELLs/MLLs and SWDs;
- c. **A map of the school** showing a basic floor plan, including classroom numbers, teacher names, and offices;
- d. **Board materials**, strategic plan (if applicable), and a narrative describing the board's self-evaluation process;
- e. **Narrative describing the process used to evaluate school leadership;**
- f. **Narrative describing the process school leadership uses to evaluate teachers;**
- g. **School administered teacher and parent surveys;**
- h. **Required NYSED CSO Parent Survey;**
- i. **Required NYSED CSO Teacher survey;**
- j. **Narrative describing the school's progress and efforts made toward reaching its enrollment and retention targets** (*including ELLs/MLLs, SWDs, EDs; if the school is not meeting its targets, describe the efforts made to do so, the evaluation of those efforts, and the results of the evaluation.*);
- k. **Admissions and Waitlist:** Provide the (1) number of new students who submitted an application for enrollment for the 2019-2020 SY, (2) number of new students admitted for the 2019-2020 SY, (3) number of students currently on the wait list for the 2019-2020 SY, (4) a backfill policy if the school has one. (5) an enrollment preference, weighted lottery, and/or set-aside if the school has one; and
- l. **Faculty/Staff Roster.**

## BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The Performance Framework, which is part of the oversight plan included in the Charter Agreement for each school, outlines 10 Performance Framework benchmarks in three key areas of charter school performance:

- Educational Success
- Organizational Soundness
- Faithfulness to Charter and Law

Observational findings from the review of the renewal application, supporting data, and the site visit will be presented in alignment with the [Performance Framework](#) benchmarks and Indicators according to the rating scale below. A brief summary of the school's strengths will precede the benchmark analysis. Each benchmark will be rated; and the report narrative will provide evidence-based information relative to each indicator.

Level	Description
Exceeds	The school meets the performance benchmark; potential exemplar in this area.
Meets	The school generally meets the performance benchmark; few concerns are noted.
Approaches	The school does not meet the performance benchmark; a number of concerns are noted.
Falls Far Below	The school falls far below the performance benchmark; significant concerns are noted.

For the site visit conducted from December 12, 2019 to December 13, 2019 at Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School, see the following Performance Framework benchmark ratings and narrative.



**New York State Education Department  
Charter School Performance Framework Rating**

Performance Benchmark		Level
<b>Educational Success</b>	<b>Benchmark 1: Student Performance:</b> The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic trends toward proficiency, proficiency, and high school graduation. At all grade levels and all assessments, scoring proficiently means achieving a performance level of 3 or higher (high school Regents and Common Core Regents exam score of 65 or higher).	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning:</b> School leaders have systems in place designed to cultivate shared accountability and high expectations and that lead to students’ well-being, improved academic outcomes, and educational success. The school has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to the New York State Learning Standards (NYSLS) for all students. Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement:</b> The school has systems in place to support students’ social and emotional health and to provide for a safe and respectful learning environment. Families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being. Families and students are satisfied with the school’s academics and the overall leadership and management of the school.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 4: Financial Condition:</b> The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.	Meets
<b>Organizational Soundness</b>	<b>Benchmark 5: Financial Management:</b> The school operates in a fiscally sound manner with realistic budgets pursuant to a long-range financial plan, appropriate internal controls and procedures, and in accordance with state law and generally accepted accounting practices.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance:</b> The board of trustees provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school while maintaining policies, establishing performance goals, and implementing systems to ensure academic success, organizational viability, board effectiveness and faithfulness to the terms of its charter.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity:</b> The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure, clearly delineated roles for staff, management, and board members. The school has systems and protocols that allow for the successful implementation, evaluation, and improvement of its academic program and operations.	Meets
<b>Faithfulness to Charter &amp; Law</b>	<b>Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements:</b> The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention:</b> The school is meeting or making annual progress toward meeting the enrollment plan outlined in its charter and its enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced priced lunch program; or has demonstrated that it has made extensive good faith efforts to attract, recruit, and retain such students.	Approaches
	<b>Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance:</b> The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.	Meets



## *Summary of Findings*

- BASCS is in year 16 of operation and serves students in kindergarten, Grades 1-2 and 5-12. During its current charter term, the school is rated in the following manner: exceeding 0 benchmark, meeting 9 benchmarks, approaching 1 benchmark, and falling far below 0 benchmark. Additional details regarding those ratings are provided below.
  
- **Areas of Strengths:**
  - BASCS has been intentional in its commitment to serving educationally disadvantaged students and providing access to a high-quality educational program that will equip them to excel in post-secondary pursuits. BASCS' performance exceeds that of the district of location and the state.
  - BASCS leaders reported a recent shift toward sharpening its culture and focus toward college enrollment and persistence. In recent years, the focus was on graduation, but as the school has experienced its first Ivy league college acceptance of a student to Dartmouth, and graduates on average have earned \$4.5 million in scholarships each year, additional emphasis is being placed on college acceptance. The school has incorporated more Advanced Placement courses, and all high school seniors are required to submit at least five college applications. The College Path Course for seniors supports development and review of applications, information about FAFSA and scholarship opportunities, and students begin college and career exploration in the 11th grade. In addition to preparation for the SAT, students have access to college-level math courses.
  
- **Areas in Need of Improvement:**
  - The renewal application does not capture the experience of the student in the school beyond the test scores and educational theory. The site visit provided a better understanding of the student experience at BASCS, which includes a focus on the whole student, from academics to social/emotional and character development.
  - Leadership is attuned to student outcomes and areas in need of improvement. The decision to shift its focus to post-secondary attainment and completion reflects the capacity to address student needs. Current college persistence was reported at a low of 20%; the school's focus on improving these results is also intended to bolster the school's capacity to attract and retain more students.
  - BASCS has exceeded the target for enrolling students considered economically disadvantaged. As of the 2019-2020 school year, 90% of students are within this subgroup. However, BASCS has not met the target for students classified as ELL/MLL (8%) nor SWD (12%). Retention rates for these subgroups are above 85%.

### **Benchmark 1: Student Performance**

*The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic trends toward proficiency, proficiency and high school graduation. At all grade levels and all assessments, scoring proficiently means achieving a performance level of 3 or higher (high school Regents and Common Core Regents exam score of 65 or higher).*

**Finding:** **Meets**

#### **Academic Program for Elementary School/Middle School/High School:**

- Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School (BASCS) serves K – Grade 2 and Grades 5 - 12 across three campuses. The school utilizes the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) framework to align curricula, horizontally and vertically, and as the basis for developing curriculum and scope and sequence of content areas. STEM-focused programming is incorporated in curriculum that offers embedded differentiation.

#### **Academic Program for Students with Disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners/Multilingual learners (ELLs/MLLs):**

- The school has developed varied, multi-level interventions and supports for students ranging from in-class intervention grouping to online learning via Khan Academy, with additional tutors and instructional accommodations integrated in general education classrooms.
- Weekly grade-level meetings at the elementary and middle-schools are shared with special education teachers who can suggest accommodations for individual students. Special education teachers at the high school are very involved with the graduation and college enrollment process. Counseling and special education services are integrated to ensure students are on the correct pathway toward post-secondary options. BASCS has established relationships with local and regional colleges that are successful in supporting students with higher-level needs.
- ENL teachers make home visits at the beginning and middle of the school year, providing translators when necessary. Common planning with general education teachers and sharing of New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners NYSITILL and New York State NYSESLAT testing results supports development of lesson plans with appropriate adaptations for ELL/MLL students.

#### **Summative Evidence for Benchmark 1:**

- In 2018-2019, percentages of students trending toward proficiency had declined in English Language Arts (ELA) by 10 percentage points since the 2015-2016 school year. The percentage of students trending toward proficiency in math had increased from 43% in 2015-2016 to 62% in 2018-2019. Over the current charter term BASCS students have increased in proficiency in both ELA and math for all students, including subgroups. Teachers attribute the increase from -3% to 22% proficiency among SWDs to adjustments in the professional development program, where teacher input and collaboration are key.

***See Attachment 1 for data tables and additional academic information.***

## Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning

*School leaders have systems in place designed to cultivate shared accountability and high expectations and that lead to students' well-being, improved academic outcomes, and educational success. The school has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to the New York State Learning Standards (NYSL) for all students. Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking, and achievement.*

**Finding:** Meets

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Curriculum</i>	<p>a. The school has a documented curriculum that is aligned to the NYSL.</p> <p>b. Teachers use unit and lesson plans that introduce complex materials, stimulate higher order thinking, and build deep conceptual understanding and knowledge around specific content.</p> <p>c. The curriculum is aligned horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and vertically between grades.</p> <p>d. The curriculum is differentiated to provide opportunities for all students to master grade-level skills and concepts.</p> <p>e. The curriculum is systematically reviewed and revised.</p>
2. <i>Instruction</i>	<p>a. The school staff has a common understanding of high-quality instruction, and observed instructional practices align to this understanding.</p> <p>b. Instructional delivery fosters engagement with all students.</p>
3. <i>Assessment and Program Evaluation</i>	<p>a. The school uses a balanced system of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments.</p> <p>b. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve student outcomes.</p> <p>c. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program and modifies the program accordingly.</p>
4. <i>Supports for Diverse Learners</i>	<p>a. The school provides supports to meet the academic needs for all students, including but not limited to: students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students.</p> <p>b. The school has systems to monitor the progress of individual students and facilitate communication between interventionists and classroom teachers regarding the needs of individual students.</p>

### Summative Evidence for Benchmark 2:

#### 1. **Element: Curriculum:**

- **Indicator a:** BASCS utilizes UbD strategies to ensure alignment with New York State Learning Standards (NYSL). The school uses *Engage NY* to develop curriculum maps for all content areas. Curricular selections are made with differentiation in mind, with a preference to those curricula

that allow for differentiation within grade-level standards. *EngageNY* modules for math and ELA are used, but teachers do not teach to a scheduled script of curriculum.

- **Indicator b:** In developing lesson and unit plans, teachers collaboratively engage in backwards planning for instruction with consideration of the acceptable evidence of outcomes. Lesson plans are forwarded to special education teachers, who respond via email with any modifications for their students. Posted lesson plans, including differentiation strategies for each classroom, were observed during the site visit.
- **Indicator c:** Teachers, specialists, and the school principal collaborate and utilize UbD as a framework to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment are in place, and that assessments accurately address student learning objectives. Review of horizontal alignment occurs as frequently as biweekly; vertical alignment is conducted quarterly, annually, and at the time of charter renewal.
- **Indicator d:** The school's curricula allow for differentiated lessons and supplemental curriculum is offered to provide targeted interventions for students needing additional support or acceleration. The directors of curriculum and instruction for ELA and math support teachers through coaching and co-teaching to enhance differentiated instructional strategies. During the focus group, school leadership discussed the gaps that exist when students re-enter or enroll at the fifth-grade level. Leaders stated that teachers are working to close the gap, which required adjustments to the curriculum to teach foundational skills to fifth-grade students who enter with a first or second grade reading level.
- **Indicator e:** The renewal application indicates that curriculum is "comprehensively and systematically," reviewed in alignment with the renewal cycle (every five years). When revisions are warranted the director of curriculum and instruction (DCI) works with content area teams that involve teachers, specialists and parents to review effectiveness of existing resources and identify resources that will meet goals. During the focus group with school leaders, they remarked on challenges in social studies performance, and have identified plans to address updates to the curriculum and related instructional strategies.

## 2. **Element: *Instruction:***

- **Indicator a:** Assessment results indicate that instructional strategies, techniques, and evaluation of instruction described in the application have positively impacted student gains. Teachers reported opportunities to observe modeling and co-teaching to support instructional practices. During the site visit, instruction observed was aligned to the curriculum and the school's academic model. There were minimal instances of time wasted, which generally happened during transitions or the securing of equipment, but most observations included high-quality, engaged instruction, and sequential teaching through strategic grouping of students.
- **Indicator b:** During the site visit, classroom observations revealed most students engaged in the lessons. Delivery of instruction was observed in both small groups and whole class direct instruction. School leadership remarked that there has been inconsistency at the middle school level from teacher turnover related to student performance on social studies assessments.

## 3. **Element: *Assessment and Program Evaluation:***

- **Indicator a:** BASCS has developed benchmark assessments aligned to NYSLS for K – Grade 12, in addition to utilizing I-Ready diagnostics, which is aligned to the Common Core. The school uses eDoctrina to monitor this benchmark data. Assessment of students' abilities and skill levels occurs quarterly, in addition to pre-identification of needed supports at the beginning of the school year.

- Annually, according to the school leaders, the instructional leadership team, including teachers, evaluates performance on state assessments to identify missed questions and other performance indicators. Teachers are invited to identify resources to supplement the curriculum, and to repackage or update lessons based on student needs.
- **Indicator b:** The school uses assessment data in planning for overall school improvement, data-driven decision making, and to monitor student progress toward proficiency. Teacher assistants provide modifications, skills instruction and vocabulary development. ELL/MLL students are engaged, as much as possible, in their home language within the general education classroom. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research study assessment is utilized to initiate and monitor trauma-informed instruction.
- School leadership reported there is a mix of teachers who understand assessment data, and others who need to improve their use of data. Quarterly reflections with the instructional leadership teams allow teachers to gain greater knowledge of how they can improve instruction, i.e. if 60% or more of students struggled on a specific standard or skill, strategies for reteaching.
- **Indicator c:** School leaders stated that the school uses academic data to inform its program evaluation. Students at the high school level are assessed on the PSAT at the 9th and 10th grade levels and students take the SAT in spring of the 11th grade year. Two years of data has shown overall improvement and student growth. School leadership indicated that they have found i-Ready diagnostics under-predict performance on the SAT. Leadership is considering implementing MAP assessments. Internally designed assessments based on a gap analysis from the state tests, using the library of questions aligned to standards, has been a better predictor of performance on the state exams. DCIs are currently developing benchmarks and conducting observations to reconstruct social studies curriculum, a content area with lower performance scores.

4. **Element: *Supports for Diverse Learners:***

- **Indicator a:** The special education coordinator is responsible for supporting teacher-developed lesson plans to ensure appropriate differentiation strategies and modifications. The renewal application described how the school provides instruction in each student's IEP for academic, behavior, developmental and cognitive needs. Special education teachers model and scaffold the use of skills that a student could apply in the regular classroom.
- Entering and emerging language learners have pull-out and push-in services where they review strategies and skills taught during the week. Services focus on instruction in the home language to first improve vocal and verbal skills. During focus group discussions, staff remarked that some ELL/MLL students enter the country later in their educational journey, and in addition to ELL/MLL services, it may be necessary to offer special education services as well, resulting in an integration of services for students and further collaboration between departments.
- **Indicator b:** The DCI meets weekly with grade-level teams to review lessons plans, ensuring plans include differentiation, and to provide instructional strategies to teachers. A math interventionist and two reading/literacy specialists also support teachers by providing push-in and pull-out support to students.
- Teachers are given the gap analysis at the beginning of the year and goal setting occurs three times each year. Teachers create data walls and DCIs review their goals along with quarterly benchmarks. Teachers meet during weekly grade-level meetings and common planning times with interventionists in math and literacy to discuss and address skill development and areas for improvement. DCIs have a presence in the classrooms to ensure practices are consistent across class and grade bands. DCIs have developed 5th and 11th grade frameworks and templates, based on fluency practice and acceleration to ensure student needs are met.

### Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement

*The school has systems in place to support students' social and emotional health and to provide for a safe and respectful learning environment. Families, community members, and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being. Families and students are satisfied with the school's academics and the overall leadership and management of the school.*

**Finding:** **Meets**

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Behavior Management and Safety</i>	<p>a. The school has a clear approach to behavioral management, including a written discipline policy.</p> <p>b. The school appears safe and all school constituents are able to articulate how the school community maintains a safe environment.</p> <p>c. The school has systems in place to ensure that the environment is free from harassment and discrimination.</p> <p>d. Classroom environments are conducive to learning and generally free from disruption.</p>
2. <i>Family Engagement and Communication</i>	<p>a. The school communicates with and engages families with the school community.</p> <p>b. Teachers communicate with parents to discuss students' strengths and needs.</p> <p>c. The school assesses family and student satisfaction using strategies such as surveys, feedback sessions, community forums, or participation logs, and considers results when making schoolwide decisions.</p> <p>d. The school has a systematic process for responding to family or community concerns.</p> <p>e. The school shares school-level academic data with the broader school community to promote transparency and accountability among parents, students and school constituents.</p>
3. <i>Social-Emotional Supports</i>	<p>a. The school has systems or programs in place to support the social-emotional needs of students.</p> <p>b. School leaders collect and use data to track the socio-emotional needs of students.</p> <p>c. School leaders collect and use data regarding the impact of programs designed to support students' social and emotional health.</p>

#### Summative Evidence for Benchmark 3:

##### 1. **Element: *Behavior Management and Safety:***

- Indicator a:** BASCS' focus on best practices is observable in its refined approach to discipline. The school formerly employed an in-school suspension program but found that a shift toward more positive behavior reinforcement would better improve the school's culture and climate. The school developed a problem-solving room (PSR) at each site which features a restorative approach and engages student in reflection and accountability. The school reports a 60% decline in discipline incidents with the shift to restorative discipline practices.



- **Indicator b:** During the site visit, each campus was observed as being safe and few to no disruptive or discipline incidents were observed; nor were there any statements or indications made during focus groups regarding safety concerns.
- **Indicator c:** BASCS employs a school support team structure at each school to ensure the school community maintains a safe environment. The dean of students is responsible for the school safety plan and protocols for student discipline. At the elementary level, school leadership focuses on building trust with parents and families and employs a trauma-informed approach to social/emotional development. The school complies with the NYS Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) which requires schools to collect and report data related to bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- **Indicator d:** During the site visit, there was some work being done to the HVAC system that caused minimal noise for some classrooms, but school staff were able to minimize disruptions. In all classrooms, environments were observed as conducive to teaching and learning.

## 2. Element: *Family Engagement and Communication:*

- **Indicator a:** BASCS hosts a variety of events and activities to engage parents. For example, literacy and STEM night activities are designed for students and families to participate together. College Info nights with parents inform them about the college application process. Since many students are first-generation college students, the school recognizes the importance of hosting one-on-one meetings with parents to engage in decision-making and planning.
- **Indicator b:** Parents have access to SchoolTool and Naviance to explore student performance, social development and any disciplinary issues. According to NYSED CSO Parent Survey results, teachers communicate regularly with parents on academic and other issues. Parents, almost unanimously on their survey, agreed. Teachers are open to meeting with parents about any student concerns, including family issues that may affect learning. In addition to teachers, the school support team fosters open communication and connection with families.
- **Indicator c:** The BASCS Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is comprised of 12 parents at each campus. This group serves as the primary source for school volunteers for such activities as lunch duty or school fundraisers. The school does not currently have a formal process to conduct screening or background checks for volunteers, according to school leaders in the focus group.
- **Indicator d:** BASCS has developed a detailed policy for public complaints and grievances, which includes guidance for directing parental or staff complaints. The policy provides for elevation to the board level, if necessary. The majority of teachers, on the NYSED CSO Teacher Survey, reported that the complaint policy is clear and fair. Parents agreed.
- **Indicator e:** BASCS uses SchoolTool, Class Dojo and social media platforms, including email, to communicate directly with parents. SchoolTool, school-wide assemblies and public outreach presentations are means also used to share data and information with the broader school community.

## 3. Element: *Social-Emotional Supports:*

- **Indicator a:** In addition to a strong academic program, BASCS employs strategies to foster student engagement with the learning process. For example, the student support team reported that it works closely with teachers to better support students involved with disciplinary issues who uses disobedience as a tactic to avoid a subject where the student is struggling. The discipline team focuses on its goal to keep students engaged in learning.

- The renewal application states that character education incorporates 12 traits to engage in social/emotional development which complements the academic program. Students engage with character education during morning meetings as a means to develop relationships among students and teachers.
- **Indicator b:** The student support services focus group participants described how, social workers, who are accessible to all students, concentrate on social/emotional supports and programs; whereas the school counselor focuses on academic preparation, which gives students a chance to differentiate school success from other issues or concerns that may impact academics. The school social worker partners with deans to group students based on social skills, organizational skills, and anger management issues by providing sensory support and resources. During the focus group discussions, teachers were confident and enthusiastic about the social workers' engagement with parents and families. The school tracks social emotional issues and incidents via a check-in/check-out system.
- **Indicator c:** School leaders report that school-wide surveys of teachers and students are used to collect data which is incorporated with review of attendance, discipline and behavior intervention data. These are also used to assess the impact of social/emotional programs. BASCS consistently monitors behavior charts, contacts and SWD goal tracking reports to further develop and refine its approach to the social/emotional health of its students.

**Benchmark 4: Financial Condition**

*The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.*

**Finding:** Meets

**Important Notes:**

- The key financial indicators used to evaluate this benchmark will be presented within a separate fiscal dashboard instrument that will provide context for the school's performance on each of the metrics, outline the specific targets for each metric, and also provide additional subsidiary detail on each calculation (see Attachment 2).
- Unless otherwise indicated, financial data is derived from the school's annual independently audited financial statements.

<b>1. Near-Term Indicators:</b>	
1a.	Current Ratio
1b.	Unrestricted Days Cash
1c.	Enrollment Variance
1d.	Composite Score
<b>2. Sustainability Indicators:</b>	
2a.	Total Margin
2b.	Debt to Asset Ratio
2c.	Debt Service Coverage Ratio

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 4:**

See the school’s fiscal dashboard attached to the end of this report (Charter School Fiscal Accountability Summary). The fiscal dashboard provides detailed information regarding the school’s compliance with Benchmark 4 of the Charter School Performance Framework.

**Financial Condition**

Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School appears to be in good financial condition as evidenced by performance on key indicators derived from the school’s independently audited financial statements.

**Overall Financial Outlook**

A *composite score* is an overall measure of financial health. This score is based on a weighting of primary reserves, equity, and net income. A charter school with a score between 1.5 and 3.0 is considered to be in strong financial health. Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School’s 2018-2019 composite score is 1.51.

**Composite Scores  
2014-2015 to 2018-2019**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Composite Score</i>
2014-2015	2.72
2015-2016	1.09
2016-2017	2.24
2017-2018	1.76
2018-2019	1.51

The fiscal dashboard indicates that the school’s cash holdings decreased significantly during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years, causing the working capital and cash position indicators to fall below the NYSED CSO’s standards. However, it must be noted that the school is in the midst of an expansion of both grade levels and enrollment. The school elected to utilize a portion of its cash holdings for investments in land, building renovations, and equipment that were required to support the expansion, but, nonetheless, has positive cash flow from operations.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Benchmark 5: Financial Management</b></p> <p><i>The school operates in a fiscally sound manner with realistic budgets pursuant to a long-range financial plan, including appropriate internal controls and procedures in accordance with state law and generally accepted accounting practices.</i></p>
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**Finding:** **Meets**

Renewal is based on evidence that the following indicators are generally present:

1. The school has an accurate and functional accounting system that includes monthly budgets.
2. The school sets budget objectives and regularly analyzes its budget in relation to those objectives.
3. The school has allocated budget surpluses in a manner that is fiscally sound and directly attends to the social and academic needs of the students attending the school.

4. The school has and follows a written set of fiscal policies.
5. The school has complied with state and federal financial reporting requirements.
6. The school has and is maintaining appropriate internal controls and procedures.
7. The school follows generally accepted accounting principles as evidenced by independent financial audits with an unqualified audit opinion, a limited number of findings that are quickly corrected, and the absence of a going concern disclosure.

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 5:**

The Charter School Office (CSO) reviewed Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School’s 2018-2019 audited financial statements to determine whether the independent auditor observed sufficient internal controls over financial reporting. The auditor did not identify any deficiencies in internal controls that could be considered material weaknesses.

In the fall of 2019, the CSO conducted a desk audit of the Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School to review the school’s sales tax, credit/debit card purchases, billings, payments, written policies and procedures, and fair value for services. The desk audit review results did not identify any deficiencies.

**Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance**

*The board of trustees provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school while maintaining policies, establishing performance goals, and implementing systems to ensure academic success, organizational viability, board effectiveness, and faithfulness to the terms of its charter.*

**Finding:** Meets

*Element*

*Indicators*

1. *Board Oversight and Governance*

- a. The board recruits and selects board members with skills and expertise that meet the needs of the school.
- b. The board engages in strategic and continuous improvement planning by setting priorities and goals that are aligned with the school’s mission and educational philosophy.
- c. The board demonstrates active oversight of the charter school management, fiscal operations, and progress toward meeting academic and other school goals.
- d. The board regularly updates school policies.
- e. The board utilizes a performance-based evaluation process for evaluating school leadership, itself, and providers.
- f. The board demonstrates full awareness of its legal obligations to the school and stakeholders.

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 6:**

**1. Element: *Board Oversight and Governance***

- **Indicator a:** The board has engaged in recruitment efforts to ensure diversity of experience and perspective within its membership, including a BASCS alumnus. During the site visit, four board

members attended the focus group representing a diversity of experience. Board members also discussed a desire to recruit parent representation to the board.

- **Indicator b:** During the focus group discussion, it was apparent the board itself is focused on establishing goals, assessing performance and continuing to raise the bar for student performance. It is intent on ensuring the school exceeds state-level performance; and is prepared to offer merit-based performance rewards to teachers achieving this goal.
- **Indicator c:** During the focus group, board members discussed an intentionality toward ensuring that teachers, across campuses, were developed and groomed for leadership positions. Board members conveyed an internal responsibility to ensure graduates not only enroll; but persist in college.
- **Indicator d:** The school has engaged an external consultant through the New York State Charter School Association to support ongoing board development, including a review of school policies. The school has worked with the CSO liaison on reviewing and revising its issues with its complaint and discipline policies.
- **Indicator e:** The renewal application describes the board’s role in the annual evaluation and monitoring of the executive director as being dependent upon its collective expertise. According to the renewal application, the executive director provides the board with quarterly and annual reports, including the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction and assessments to ensure rigor, increasing proficiency, and college readiness.
- **Indicator f:** Board membership includes an attorney, with extensive school law experience, who ensures that the board is aware and knowledgeable about its legal obligations.

**Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity**

*The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure and clearly delineated roles for staff, management, and board members. The school has systems and protocols that allow for the successful implementation, evaluation, and improvement of its academic program and operations.*

**Finding: Meets**

Element

Indicators

1. *School Leadership*

- a. The school has an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to a clearly defined mission and set of goals, allowing for continual improvement in student learning.
- b. Roles and responsibilities for leaders, staff, management, and board members are clearly defined. Members of the school community adhere to defined roles and responsibilities.
- c. The school has clear and well-established communication systems and decision-making processes in place which ensure effective communication across the school.
- d. The school successfully recruits, hires, and retains key personnel, and makes decisions – when warranted – to remove ineffective staff members.

2. *Professional Climate*

- a. The school is fully staffed with high quality personnel to meet all educational and operational needs, including finance, human resources, and communication.
- b. The school has established structures for frequent collaboration among teachers.

Element

Indicators

	<p>c. The school ensures that staff has requisite skills, expertise, and professional development necessary to meet students' needs.</p> <p>d. The school has systems to monitor and maintain organizational and instructional quality—which includes a formal process for teacher evaluation geared toward improving instructional practice.</p> <p>e. The school has mechanisms to solicit teacher feedback and gauge teacher satisfaction.</p>
<p>3. <i>Contractual Relationships</i> <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>	<p>a. The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with the management company or comprehensive service provider.</p> <p>b. Changes in the school's charter management or comprehensive service provider contract comply with required charter amendment procedures.</p> <p>c. The school monitors the efficacy of contracted service providers or partners.</p>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 7:**

**1. Element: *School Leadership***

- **Indicator a:** Each level of leadership at BASCS is committed to advancing the school's mission, which is evidenced by its focus on continual assessment of student outcomes, curriculum review, and observation of instructional practices.
- **Indicator b:** BASCS updated its organizational chart, which is clear; however, the depiction of the structure does not convey how the academic and instructional leadership engages and interacts with school principals and campus-level instructional staff. Board and school leader focus group discussions provided greater insight related to this engagement, and the renewal application included charts depicting the roles and responsibilities for respective positions.
- **Indicator c:** BASCS leaders and teachers collaborate at all levels, according to school leaders. The curriculum/instruction and leadership teams conduct regular walk-throughs and classroom observations to assess instructional activities and strategies. Teachers are empowered to give feedback and develop initiatives to advance student acquisition of skills.
- **Indicator d:** During the site visit it became evident from the school leaders focus group discussion that BASCS hires from within and provides advancement opportunities for teachers and support staff. Several teachers and student support staff started as teaching assistants. In many instances the teacher assistant becomes a teacher in the classroom they formerly supported. Both of the DCIs, and the middle school and the high school principal served as teachers or social workers prior to moving into a leadership role. Teachers are encouraged to pursue certification, advanced degrees and continuing education credits for further advancement. This "grow your own," approach ensures a deeper understanding of the school model, as well as the continuity of the school culture.

**2. Element: *Professional Climate***

- **Indicator a:** In addition to employing highly skilled and high-quality personnel, BASCS has acquired additional support to ensure student needs are met. For example, the school currently has seven graduate-level social work interns at the elementary level and five at the middle school level who rotate through classes during the week. The team conducts home visits, and provides referrals for



services, specifically for Tier 2 and 3 students to individual and group counseling. They also provide crisis and de-escalation support.

- Leadership explained that the current organizational structure creates a buffer between the principal and the teacher; principals are free to focus on review of the data and student outcomes, evaluation of instruction and learning. Coaching is the primary responsibility of the DCIs, who are content specialists and are also responsible for building and maintaining professional climate and school culture.
- During the board focus group, a member remarked on the importance of freeing the school director to focus on all three campuses. He is considering hiring a special projects coordinator to manage facility issues.
- **Indicator b:** Teachers and DCIs meet weekly to review lesson plans. School leaders reported that teachers access a shared google docs site which includes rating of student ability/achievement level based on NYSLS. Special populations staff, including special education and ELL/MLL teachers, and DCIs meet weekly to review lesson plans by grade levels, and meet during teacher common planning time to discuss lesson plans or specific students. Teachers engage in peer to peer mentoring and coaching, and interventionists also collaborate with teachers.
- **Indicator c:** BASCS utilizes the Danielson model for teacher evaluation, which includes announced and unannounced observations. The teacher evaluation protocol allows for immediate feedback to provide opportunities for growth for the instructional staff. As stated in the renewal application, teachers also model lessons for one another through co-teaching and demonstration teaching, which furthers collaboration and support among staff. School leaders stated that peer observations are effective in improving teaching.
- **Indicator d:** School leaders reported that BASCS is developing a more consistent practice to involve the special populations team in classroom walkthroughs to further support general education teachers. Rubrics to guide these walkthroughs are being developed.
- **Indicator e:** BASCS has a multi-layered approach to soliciting feedback and gauging teacher satisfaction through various channels. The instructional leadership team solicits feedback during observations and evaluation conferences throughout the year. These touch points allow teachers to give and receive feedback on their annual professional goals. Additionally, teachers complete online surveys quarterly, which are related to professional development and school climate.

### 3. Element: *Contractual Relationships*

- **Indicator a:** Not Applicable

## Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements

*The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.*

**Finding:** Meets

Element

Indicators

1. *Mission and Key Design Elements*

- a. School stakeholders share a common and consistent understanding of the school's mission and key design elements outlined in the charter.
- b. The school has fully implemented the key design elements in the approved charter and in any subsequently approved revisions.

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 8:**

**1. Element: *Mission and Key Design Elements***

- **Indicator a:** Focus group discussions with school leaders, teachers and board members revealed that there is a common and consistent understanding of the school's mission and key design elements. Leaders and teachers remarked that the school focuses on "building relationships," between students and teachers to further advance the school's mission. Teachers reported that leadership has an "open door policy," and supports them by either providing or helping to find the solution to any issue or concern.
- **Indicator b.** The school reports, in its renewal application, that a thorough analysis of the key design elements has been shared with stakeholder groups such as parents, staff, board members, and others. The purpose was to identify the components of each element and what indicators of full implementation look like.

**Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention**

*The school is meeting or making annual progress toward meeting the enrollment plan outlined in its charter and its enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced priced lunch program; or has demonstrated that it has made extensive good faith efforts to attract, recruit, and retain such students.*

**Finding: Approaches**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
1. <i>Targets are met</i>	a. The school maintains sufficient enrollment demand for the school to meet or come close to meeting the enrollment plan outlined in the charter.
2. <i>Targets are not met</i>	<p>a. The school is making regular and significant annual progress toward meeting the targets.</p> <p>b. The school has implemented extensive recruitment strategies and program services to attract and retain students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. Strategies include, but are not limited to: outreach to parents and families in the surrounding communities, widely publicizing the lottery for such school, efforts to academically support these students, and enrollment policy revisions, such as employing a weighted lottery or enrollment preference, to increase the proportion of enrolled students from the three priority populations.</p> <p>c. The school has implemented a systematic process for evaluating recruitment and outreach strategies and program services for each of the three categories of students, and makes strategic improvements as needed.</p>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 9:**

**1. Element: *Targets are met* N/A**

**2. Element: *Targets are not met***

- **Indicator a:** According to SED data, BASCS has exceeded the target for enrolling students considered educationally disadvantaged. As of the 2019-2020 school year, 90% of students are within this subgroup. However, BASCS had not met the target for students classified as ELL/MLL (8%) nor SWD (12%). Retention rates for these subgroups are above 85%, which school leaders believe may be attributed to the school's counseling and support programs.
- **Indicator b:** In its renewal application, the school reports recruitment and outreach activities that are varied and targeted to attract special populations. Targeted strategies are employed for respective target groups, which includes marketing and developing relationships with specific organizations and groups affiliated with special student populations. Although backfilling for general education students ceases on November 1 of each year, the school leaders indicated that SWDs and ELLs/MLLs are accepted all year long.
- The outreach coordinator ensures prospective ELL/MLL students receive the home language questionnaire and conducts an interview with parents/family before a student is tested, as reported during the special populations focus group. Staff also take a case management approach to meet with parents individually to answer or clarify any questions about or on the home language questionnaire.
- **Indicator c:** The school hosts open houses and school tour shadow opportunities for prospective students. During the focus group discussions staff remarked that "building relationships with parents," has helped make connections with organizations and "word of mouth," referrals have proven successful methods of recruitment.
- The renewal application indicated that the outreach coordinator reaches out to ethnic and affinity organizations, and brochures are "drop[ped] off," at these centers.

***See Attachment 1 for data tables and additional information.***

**Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance**

*The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.*

**Finding: Meets**

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Legal Compliance</i>	<p>a. The school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws and the provisions of its charter including, but not limited to: those related to student admissions and enrollment; FOIL and Open Meetings Law; protecting the rights of students and employees; financial management and oversight; governance and reporting; and health and safety requirements.</p> <p>b. The school has undertaken appropriate corrective action when needed and has implemented necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements.</p> <p>c. The school has sought Board of Regents and/or Charter School Office approval for significant revisions.</p>

## Summative Evidence for Benchmark 10:

### 1. Element: *Legal Compliance*

- **Indicator a:** BASCS generally complies with applicable laws and regulations. Following a review of board policies by the CSO, the school made required corrections and submitted the final documents. BASCS reports no formal complaints and no audit findings during the current term of the charter.
- **Indicator b:** The BASCS Board of Trustees has developed internal Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) to proactively address concerns identified in the Notice of Deficiency by the CSO in 2018-2019. The CAP addressed the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled at the charter school as compared with the district. The school is addressing this deficiency and has increased enrollment of these students.
- **Indicator c:** In 2015 and 2016, BASCS sought approval to add elementary grades and to increase enrollment. BASCS was approved to add K-Grade 2, and Grades 5-6; and through its renewal seeks to add Grades 3 and 4. The school sought four material revisions throughout its charter, two of them being in this charter term.