**OnTECH Charter High School and the Board of Trustees respectfully submit these evaluative comments to the 2022-2023 Renewal Site Visit Report, dated June 2, 2023.**

OnTECH is doing innovative work in the education space, rethinking the high school experience in order to provide meaningful and impactful programming for at-risk students in the City of Syracuse. In less than five years, we have created a community where young people who have opted out of school, opt in. We have a clothing pantry, food pantry, prom closet, accessible tele-therapeutic services, on-site employment opportunities, four season athletic program, Saturday school, and a year-round trimester academic program that allows students to recoup credits to graduate in four, five or six years.

We appreciate the work that went into the 2022-2023 Renewal Site Visit Report and believe that anything short of a five year renewal would be arbitrary and capricious as compared to the charter terms offered to transfer and non-transfer charter schools in New York State. It should be noted that there were significant factual corrections that were made between the Final Report (May 15, 2023) and Revised Final Report (June 2, 2023) (“Renewal Site Visit Report or RSVP”).

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS** (RSVP, p.9)

***The Summary of Findings relies on certain misinformation that was corrected in the Revised Final Report***. The Summary of Areas In Need of Improvement in the Summary of Findings state “[w]hile the school currently has strong interim school-level leadership, the lack of stability over the school’s first charter term caused delays and difficulties in program implementation, such as data management and instructional coaching.” However, data management and instructional coaching are two items in the May 15 Final Report that were based on evidence found factually incorrect, as evidenced in the June 2, 2023 Revised Final Report. Data management and instructional coaching are, in fact, areas of strength for OnTECH.

With regard to data management, since Spring 2022, OnTECH has a custom-built data dashboard and data is updated and published on a weekly basis for teachers to use in their lesson plans and in support of teaching and learning. Data is discussed in context of teaching and learning in weekly all-staff, grade and department meetings amongst administrators, teachers, deans and support staff. Data is discussed with the Board of Trustees on a monthly basis.

With regard to instructional coaching, OnTECH employs a clearly defined instructional evaluation and coaching model that incorporates evaluation and feedback from peers, department heads and from outside consultants, starting in the fall and extending into the spring. Consultants come into the school (1) to assess the health of teaching and learning from the perspective of students and staff, (2) to work individually evaluating and coaching teachers, and (3) to evaluate teaching and learning specific to students who receive special education services. Individual teachers were assigned master teachers and provided co-teaching opportunities to support and strengthen teaching and learning throughout the year.

**OnTECH has addressed all concerns relating to short term sustainability mentioned in the Summary of Findings**. The Final Report says that “there is some concern that the transition to the new leadership has taken so long and is still some ways from concluding.” (RSVP, p. 23). First, the Board of Trustees was intentional in naming an interim head of school for the final year of the charter term to ensure that the school was high-performing in academics and in all business aspects prior to embarking on a national search and bringing on a new principal for the next charter term. An announcement of a new principal is expected imminently.

The search for the new principal has been extensive and rigorous. After conducting a competitive bidding process, the Board of Trustees hired Executive Director, Barry Rowland (BDR Training and Consulting Services Inc.) to conduct a search for the new principal. In the fall of 2022 the Board developed a job description that was posted and circulated and shows clear reporting structures. Based on the position description, over 500 personal contacts were made to potential candidates including 45 potential candidates in comparable positions in the Rochester/Syracuse and surrounding school districts. Approximately 60 candidates showed initial interest. Candidates were forwarded specific job related questions with 34 completing their submission. Selected candidates were interviewed to complete the vetting process. 23 dossiers were submitted in the pool of candidates to the school. The pool of candidates was highly qualified including individuals with the following credentials:

* 43% EdD/PhD
* 74% charter school experience
* 43% experience with international student populations
* 52% with special education credentials/experience working
* Average length of major leadership experience= 17 years
* Significantly diverse candidate pool
* Significant experience K-12

12 of the 23 dossiers were virtually screened by the Interim Head of School who in turn forwarded six dossiers to the Board of Trustees who conducted virtual interviews. From this group, OnTECH extended an invitation to three individuals to attend an all-day, on-campus interview with parent, student and teacher focus groups. Two of the three applicants came to campus. Upon the Regents vote on OnTECH’s charter renewal application, the Board of Trustees looks forward to extending an offer to a competent and experienced school leader to lead the school through the next charter term. Notably, the current interim head of school has legal, instructional and school leadership expertise of over 30 years, teaching at the middle school, high school and graduate school level, while honing an expertise as an attorney in education law with a focus on litigation relating to equity and inclusion in education in California and New York.

**BENCHMARK 10: LEGAL COMPLIANCE** (RSVP, p. 32)

***Any issues relating to fingerprinting and clearance have been resolved.*** The 2023 Final Report states “A check of the school’s staff in 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 revealed that the school officials violate fingerprinting and clearance requirements for staff, a serious safety violation.” (Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance. Indicator a. page 32). Notably, OnTECH never received any information relating to the specifics of this violation, even after inquiry. Nevertheless, in response to legal compliance concerns, during the 2021-2022 school year, responsibility for securing fingerprint clearances and all other hiring documents was shifted from the then Principal (who is no longer employed by OnTECH) to the current CFO/HR Manager. The CFO/HR Manager follows a specifically delineated process as to fingerprinting and clearance requirements identified both in the school offer letter and the HR staff handbook. As part of our financial audit, since 2021-2022, hiring documents for every newly hired employee were requested and found to be in order, identifying no fingerprinting and clearance violations.

**NYSED DATA DASHBOARD** (RSVP, p. 33)

***OnTECH outperforms similarly situated schools*.**As part of the NYSED Data Dashboard,the Final Report sets forth the following chart illustrating a Similar Schools Comparison relating to Benchmark 1, Indicator 1 (p.34).

***2022 3-8 Assessments; 2021 4 Year Graduations***

| **OnTECH CHS** | **ELA Differential** | **Math Differential** | **Science Differential** | **Graduation Rate Differential** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Transfer High School** | **+/- 7.5** | **Academy School** |  |  |  | **+3** |
| **Bronx Arena HS** |  |  |  | **-6** |
| **Research and Service HS** |  |  |  | **-11** |
| **Voyages Prep-South Queens** |  |  |  | **-26** |
| **Voyages Preparatory** |  |  |  | **+6** |
| **Mean** |  |  |  | **-7** |
| **+/- 10** | **Brooklyn Bridge Academy** |  |  |  | **-4** |
| **Queens Satellite HS for Opportunity** |  |  |  | **+6** |
| **Satellite Academy HS** |  |  |  | **+4** |
| **Mean** |  |  |  | **+2** |
|  |  | **Mean** |  |  |  | **-4** |

However, this chart compares data between OnTECH and similarly situated schools from 2021. However, OnTECH did not have a full graduating cohort until 2022. Notably, graduation data from 2022 shows that OnTECH greatly outperformed similarly situated schools, with a mean differential of +46. The following chart breaks down the differential by school for graduation years 2021 and 2022.

| OnTECH CHS | **Graduation Rate Differential 2021** |  **Graduation Rate Differential 2022** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  Transfer High School |  +/- 7.5 |  Academy School | **+3** | **+29** |
|  Bronx Arena HS | **-6** | **+39** |
|  Research and Service HS | **-11** | **+37** |
|  Voyages Prep-South Queens | **-26** | **+9** |
|  Voyages Preparatory | **+6** | **+55** |
| Mean  | **-7** | **+34** |
|  +/- 10 |  Brooklyn Bridge Academy | **-4** | **+39** |
|  Queens Satellite HS for Opportunity | **+6** | **+57** |
|  Satellite Academy HS | **+4** | **+50** |
| Mean | **+2** | **+49** |
| Mean | **-4** | **+46** |