New York State Education Department

Remote Renewal Site Visit Report for BoR-Authorized Charter Schools under the 2015 Charter School Performance Framework 2020-2021

Niagara Charter School

Remote Renewal Site Visit: December 7-8, 2020
Date of Report: March 10, 2021

Charter School Office
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234
charterschools@nysed.gov
518-474-1762

Table of Contents

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION **3**

METHODOLOGY **5**

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS **7**

Summary of Findings 9
Benchmark 1: Student Performance 10
Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning 11
Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement 15
Benchmark 4: Financial Condition 19
Benchmark 5: Financial Management 20
Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance 21
Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity 23
Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements 26
Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention 27
Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance 29

ATTACHMENT 1: BENCHMARKS 1 AND 9 DATA **30**

ATTACHMENT 2: CHARTER SCHOOLS FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY DASHBOARD **39**

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Charter School Summary[1]

Name of Charter School	Niagara Charter School
Board Chair	James C. Muffoletto
District of location	Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District
Opening Date	Fall 2005
Charter Terms	• Initial Term: July 21, 2005 - June 30, 2010 • First Renewal Term: July 1, 2010 - June 30, 2013 • Second Renewal Term: July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014 • Third Renewal Term: July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2016 • Fourth Renewal Term: July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2021
Current Term Authorized Grades/ Approved Enrollment	K- Grade 6/ 350 students
Proposed Renewal Term Authorized Grades/Proposed Approved Enrollment	K- Grade 6/ 350 students
Comprehensive Management Service Provider	None
Facilities	2077 Lockport Road, Niagara Falls, New York 14304 - Private Space
Mission Statement	*Niagara Charter School is a project-based learning K-6 school that fosters the unique potential of each child through involvement in original research, critical thinking, and problem-solving, along with development of character and active learning skills*.
Key Design Elements	• EL Education's five core practices: curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture and character, and leadership; • Habits of Scholarship: perseverance, respect, integrity, dedication, and excellence; • Extended school day and year; and • Enrichment and remediation block.
Requested Revisions	• **to amend a key design element of the school's calendar from 190 instructional days to 180 instructional days to align to the calendar of the district of residence of the majority of enrolled students;** • **to amend the school's mission to ensure alignment to the school's key design elements of EL Education and the Leader in Me practices; and** • **to amend the school's vision statement to ensure alignment to the school's key design elements of EL Education and the Leader in Me practices.**

[1] The information in this section was provided by the NYS Education Department Charter School Office.

Noteworthy: Niagara Charter School (Niagara) serves K- Grade 6 and implements an EL (formerly Expeditionary Learning) Education model. Through this model, the school utilizes a crew morning meeting structure to support character development and implements a rigorous academic program that emphasizes real-world learning and experiences to foster critical thinking, communication skills, and the development of meaningful, authentic work.

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.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC NOTE: As of the publication of this report, New York State is in the midst of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. NYSED understands that these are not normal times and state assessments for Grades 3-8 as well as high school students were canceled for the 2019-2020 school year (see the applicable memos at http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/aboutcharterschools/lawsandregs/law.html). The NYSED Charter School Performance Framework is a robust document that allows NYSED to continue to use it as an evaluative tool even during the current statewide crisis. With state assessments cancelled for the 2019-2020 school year, Benchmark 1 allows for the use of longitudinal data and NYSED has been continuing to monitor and evaluate schools through the lens of the Performance Framework during the current crisis as Board of Regents-authorized charter schools have been implementing robust continuity of learning plans and adhering to NYSED's Remote Monitoring and Oversight Plan. Therefore, NYSED will continue to use the Performance Framework and Board of Regents renewal policies to evaluate, in a summative manner, applicable charter schools for renewal recommendation determinations.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Current Grade Levels and Approved Enrollment

	Year 1 2016 to 2017	**Year 2 2017 to 2018**	**Year 3 2018 to 2019**	**Year 4 2019 to 2020**	**Year 5 2020 to 2021**
Grade Configuration	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6
Total Approved Enrollment	350	350	350	350	350

Proposed Renewal Term Grade Levels and Projected Enrollment Requested by the School[2]

	Year 1 2021 to 2022	**Year 2 2022 to 2023**	**Year 3 2023 to 2024**	**Year 4 2024 to 2025**	**Year 5 2025 to 2026**
Grade Configuration	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6	K-Grade 6
Total Proposed Enrollment	350	350	350	350	350

METHODOLOGY

A two-day remote renewal site visit was conducted at Niagara Charter School (Niagara) on December 7-8, 2020. The New York State Education Department's Charter School Office (CSO) team conducted

[2] This proposed chart was submitted by the Niagara CS in its renewal application. It is subject to change pending the final renewal recommendation and approval by the Board of Regents.

interviews with the board of trustees, school leadership team, student support team, and teachers. In cooperation with school leadership, the CSO administered anonymous online surveys to parents.

The team conducted fourteen remote classroom observations in K - Grade 6. The observations were approximately 15 minutes in length and conducted jointly with the chief academic officer and assistant academic officer. NYSED utilizes the CSO's remote Classroom Observation Worksheet as a lens for remote classroom observations. It is shared with the school prior to the site visit, and can be found in the Renewal SV Protocol.

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

- **Current 2020-2021 organizational chart;**
- **A 2020-2021 master school schedule;**
- **Board materials (roster, minutes, and strategic plan, if applicable) and a narrative describing the board's self-evaluation process;**
- **Narrative describing the process used to evaluate school leadership;**
- **Narrative describing the process school leadership uses to evaluate teachers;**
- **Spring 2020 CSO COVID-19 Parent Survey Results;**
- **2019-2020 CSO Parent Survey Results;**
- **2019-2020 CSO Teacher Survey Results;**
- **2019-2020 Measurable Results Assessment (MRA) Survey Results;**
- **2020-2021 Crew Survey Results;**
- **Current school policies, including the discipline policy, complaint policy, enrollment and admissions policy, and by-laws;**
- **NYSED Attachment 1: Academic and Enrollment Data;**
- **NYSED Attachment 2: Fiscal Dashboard Data;**
- **Narrative describing the school's progress and efforts made toward reaching its enrollment and retention targets;**
- **Admissions and Waitlist information;**
- **Faculty/Staff Roster;**
- **Fingerprint Clearance Certificates for all instructional and non-instructional staff;**
- **School-submitted Annual Reports during current charter term;**
- **School's Self-Evaluation Tool;**
- **Prior CSO monitoring reports (check-in, mid-term, renewals);**
- **Spring 2020 Continuity of Learning Plan;**
- **School's 2020 renewal application;**
- **School's 2019 Notices of Deficiency/Concern; and**
- **Any supplementary evidence or data submitted to NYSED by the school.**

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The 2015 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 2015 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 7, 2020 to December 8, 2020 at Niagara, see the following Performance Framework benchmark ratings and narrative.

New York State Education Department
2015 Charter School Performance Framework Rating[3]

	2015 Performance Benchmark	Level
Educational Success	**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).	**Meets**
	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 (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**
	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.	**Meets**
Organizational Soundness	**Benchmark 4: Financial Condition:** The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.	**Meets**
	Benchmark 5: Financial Management: 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.	**Approaches**
	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.	**Meets**
	Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity: 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**
Faithfulness to Charter & Law	**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.	**Meets**
	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.	**Meets**
	Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance: The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.	**Meets**

[3] Charter schools authorized or renewed beginning in the 2019-2020 school year and thereafter use the 2019 Charter School Performance Framework, and all other charter schools use the 2015 Charter School Performance Framework until renewal. Refer to the appropriate framework for the applicable benchmark standards.

Summary of Findings

Niagara is in year 16 of operation and serves students in K-Grade 6. During its current charter term, the school is rated in the following manner: meeting nine benchmarks and approaching one benchmark. A summary of those ratings is provided below.

Summary of Areas of Strengths:

- As affirmed through focus groups and surveys, a shared mission of providing a challenging academic program, paired with character development through use of EL Education principles, is emphasized and implemented at Niagara. An annual EL work plan is created and assessed, all teachers participate in monthly EL professional development, an EL school designer supports curricular mapping, and the cooperation agreement with EL Education provides for participation at EL institutes, conferences, and regional leadership cohorts.
- Niagara outperformed its district of location, its primary sending district, and New York State (NYS) in English language arts (ELA) and math overall in the 2018-2019 school year. Furthermore, outcomes for economically disadvantaged (ED) students surpassed the three comparisons in both subjects across 2014-2015 through 2018-2019.
- Niagara has increased its enrollment of students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) to acceptable ranges when compared to both its district of location, Niagara Wheatfield Central School District, and its primary sending district, Niagara Falls City School District. It has consistently enrolled economically disadvantaged students at a higher rate than either school district.
- Beginning in November 30, 2020, Niagara transitioned to a fully remote, synchronous schedule that largely mirrors its in-person, grade-level structures with end-of-day office hours. Across 14 remote classroom observations in December 2020, CSO team members observed the use of over ten different engagement strategies to foster student involvement and learning, including whiteboards, equity sticks, breakout rooms, and the use of students' hands for thumbs up, fist to five, etc.

Summary of Areas in Need of Improvement:

- While Niagara's ELA and math outcomes for SWDs outperformed the primary sending district and district of location, outcomes no longer surpass NYS averages as of the 2018-2019 school year (-8 percentage points in ELA and -4 percentage points in math).
- While Niagara was fully enrolled during the charter term and enrolled a higher percentage of ED students than its primary sending district, Niagara Falls CSD, and its district of location, Niagara-Wheatfield CSD, the school remains just below the SWD enrollment of Niagara Falls CSD and the ELL enrollment of Niagara Falls CSD and Niagara-Wheatfield CSD.
- Niagara must also remedy deficiencies in the school's fingerprinting process prior to hiring new staff members

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

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 1:
During the 2018-2019 school year, the most recent year of available NYS testing results, Niagara surpassed its primary sending district, Niagara Falls CSD, its district of location, Niagara-Wheatfield CSD, and NYS averages in both ELA and math overall. Furthermore, across the 2014-2015 through 2018-2019 school years, outcomes for ED students also surpassed all three comparison groups. For SWDs, outcomes surpassed both Niagara Falls CSD and Niagara-Wheatfield CSD in both ELA and math across all five years. In relation to NYS averages, while outcomes for SWDs surpassed NYS earlier in the charter term, in 2018-2019, there were gaps to NYS of eight percentage points in ELA and four percentage points in math.

See Attachment 1 for data tables and additional academic information.

Note: State assessments were not administered in the 2019-2020 school year. As such, NYSED is not able to include results from that academic year in the analysis of this benchmark.

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 (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.

Finding: Meets

Element	*Indicators*
1. Curriculum	a. The school has a documented curriculum that is aligned to the NYSLS. 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. c. The curriculum is aligned horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and vertically between grades. d. The curriculum is differentiated to provide opportunities for all students to master grade-level skills and concepts. e. The curriculum is systematically reviewed and revised.
2. Instruction	a. The school staff has a common understanding of high-quality instruction, and observed instructional practices align to this understanding. b. Instructional delivery fosters engagement with all students.
3. Assessment and Program Evaluation	a. The school uses a balanced system of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments. b. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve student outcomes. c. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program and modifies the program accordingly.
4. Supports for Diverse Learners	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. 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.

Academic Program for Elementary School:

- ES:
    - Niagara implements an EL Education model, which emphasizes mastery of knowledge and skills, character development, and high-quality student work, largely through connections to real-world issues and field work.
    - The school utilizes EL protocols (e.g., Socratic seminars, revision and critique protocols) and participation techniques (e.g., concentric circles, bounce cards) to engage students in challenging instruction and build their critical thinking and application skills.
    - Beginning in November 30, 2020, Niagara transitioned to a fully remote, synchronous schedule that largely mirrors its in-person, grade-level structures with end-of-day office hours. Every grade level has a building substitute to support small-group break outs and tailored student interventions.

Academic Program for Students with Disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs):

- SWDs:
    - To meet the needs of SWDs, Niagara employs two special education teachers, one of whom serves as special education coordinator. They provide consultant teacher services within the general education setting across K-Grade 6. An academic intervention services staff member also provides support for students considered to be at risk. The school also contracts with Buffalo Hearing and Speech to provide speech and language, as well as occupational and physical therapy, services.
    - During remote learning, special education teachers push into math and ELA blocks, work with students in small-group breakouts, work individually with students, and modify learning materials to support students at their levels.
- ELLs:
    - Niagara currently enrolls two ELLs who both receive daily individual support in ELA and math by either a special education teacher or an academic intervention teacher. Leadership follows guidance from and works with the local Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to ensure alignment with required minutes.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 2:

1. Element: ***Curriculum***:
    - **Indicator a:** As described in the renewal application narrative, Niagara utilizes *EngageNY* curricular modules in ELA and math, in conjunction with the EL Education approach. As of the 2020-2021 school year, the school is implementing *Units of Study* from Lucy Calkins and the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University to enhance ELA across K-Grade 6. Additional recent curricular updates include the implementation of TCI's *Social Studies Alive!* in K-Grade 6 in 2019-2020, the use of the *BOCES 4 Science* kits in K-Grade 5 beginning in 2019-2020, and the purchase of *Amplify Science* for Grade 6 in 2020-2021. During the school leadership focus group, school leaders affirmed these recent updates, which were driven by an interest in increasing daily writing and aligning more fully with NYSLS. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree there is a documented curriculum aligned to NYSLS.
    - **Indicator b:** According to the renewal application narrative, Niagara teachers share daily common planning time to create weekly lesson plans, which are submitted to the school's instructional coach and assistant academic officer weekly for feedback. Lesson plans are expected to include strategic questions, EL protocols, total participation techniques, differentiation, and assessments

to stimulate higher order thinking and build conceptual understanding. In the 2019 CSO survey, teachers describe academic rigor as establishing clear learning and character targets, challenging students to think critically, and differentiating to meet the needs of all learners. According to the 2020 COVID-19 Parent Survey, 75% of parents report that their child's schoolwork is challenging.

- **Indicator c:** As described in the renewal application narrative, the assigned EL Education school designer and local BOCES specialists provide curricular planning support to align curricula horizontally across classrooms and vertically between grades. During the school leadership focus group, school leaders affirmed annual agreements with EL Education and BOCES that provide for designated days to review curricula maps, assess alignment to NYSLS, identify gaps, and make any adjustments accordingly. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 95% of teachers agree the curriculum is aligned horizontally across same grade-level classrooms and 90% of teachers agree the curriculum is aligned vertically among grade levels.
- **Indicator d:** The renewal application narrative describes multiple ways differentiation is woven into lesson plans and student opportunities, including use of flexible groupings based on students' academic levels, different approaches to a task to achieve the same goal, and tiered texts to support different reading levels. According to the 2019 CSO tTeacher Survey, differentiation is supported through strategic small grouping, modified materials and assignments, tiered texts at different levels, and supplemental materials (e.g., sentence starters, graphic organizers, manipulatives).
- **Indicator e:** According to the renewal application narrative, and affirmed in the leadership focus group, all curricula are reviewed throughout the year by the school's instructional coach and leadership team with the EL school designer and BOCES specialists as part of designated curricula days in each agreement. For example, leadership noted working with BOCES to select *Units of Study* from Lucy Calkins for the new writing curriculum to address the interest of increased writing.

2. Element: ***Instruction***:
    - **Indicator a:** The renewal application narrative describes high-quality instruction as the active use of learning targets throughout a lesson, utilization of strategic questioning and EL structures (e.g., Socratic seminars, critique protocols, concentric circles, bounce cards), and the use of real-world connections and technology/web-based resources across content areas. During focus groups, school leaders described high quality instruction as differentiated, fostering meaningful student engagement, and producing high quality student work. CSO team members observed differentiation during remote observations largely through the presence of a special education teacher or building substitute to supplement how students are engaged and to pull small-group break outs.
    - **Indicator b:** As described in the school leadership focus group, school leaders emphasized student engagement, not compliance, as a tenet of high-quality instruction with leadership and staff working diligently and utilizing BOCES resources to develop engagement strategies in the remote setting. Across 14 remote observations in December 2020, CSO team members observed the use of over ten different engagement strategies to foster student involvement and learning, including whiteboards, Jamboards, equity sticks, breakout rooms, chat features, and the use of students' hands for thumbs up, fist to five, etc. According to the 2020 COVID-19 Parent Survey, 60% rate the school excellent and an additional 29% rate the school good in providing instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

- **Indicator a:** Niagara utilizes a variety of formative and summative assessments to assess student achievement and diagnose areas needing improvement, including exit tickets, observational records, EL projects and rubrics, student portfolios, NWEA MAP (K-Grade 6) testing in ELA and math, and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). During the school leadership focus group, school leaders confirmed that daily assessments and exit tickets, as well as NWEA MAP and Fountas and Pinnell testing, are still occurring during remote learning.
- **Indicator b:** The renewal application narrative describes how teachers use individual student and class data reports to differentiate students' learning, including use of small groups within the classroom and supplemental small-group support outside the classroom. According to the 2019 CSO survey, teachers use data from informal and formal assessments (e.g., student rubrics, exit tickets, weekly progress monitoring, quarterly interim assessments) to create student groups, design remediation and enrichment blocks, and guide further instruction around particular standards.
- **Indicator c:** As described in the renewal application narrative, administration and teachers together analyze trend reports from ANet (previously used benchmark assessment through school year 2019-2020), NWEA MAP, and NYS tests as well as stakeholder surveys to inform instructional decisions and changes to the academic program. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree the administration uses data from assessments to make school-wide decisions. Both the school leadership and board focus groups described utilizing teacher survey and exit interview feedback to inform recommended updates to the school calendar.

4. Element: ***Supports for Diverse Learners***:
    - **Indicator a:** Niagara provides a continuum of supports to meet the needs of all learners. For students struggling academically, Niagara provides progressively more intensive push-in and pull-out academic supports with an interventionist as part of Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI). To meet the needs of SWDs, Niagara employs two special education teachers, one of whom serves as special education coordinator. They provide consultant teacher services within the general education setting across K-Grade 6. Special education staff were observed pushing into remote observations and providing additional directions to students using the chat feature. The school also contracts with Buffalo Hearing and Speech to provide speech and language, as well as occupational and physical therapy, services. Niagara currently enrolls two ELLs, who are provided daily instruction in math and ELA by either a special education or academic intervention teacher aligned to required minutes. According to the 2019 CSO survey, nearly 85% of teachers find the special education program to be strong and effective.
    - **Indicator b:** According to the renewal application narrative, the RtI team, which consists of the special education coordinator, administration, and the general education and special education teachers for referred students, meets monthly to monitor the effectiveness of supports and modify intervention plans as needed. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 95% of teachers affirm the availability of a special education teacher/coordinator to help create modifications and accommodations for individual students.

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

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

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 3:

1. Element: ***Behavior Management and Safety:***
   - **Indicator a:** Niagara has an established code of character, known as P.R.I.D.E. (perseverance, respect, integrity, dedication, and excellence), which outlines expectations for students and staff and is used daily to acknowledge positive and challenging behaviors. According to the 2019 CSO

survey, nearly 95% of teachers find a uniform expectation for classroom management and nearly 90% of teachers find the school-wide discipline policy is consistently applied.

- **Indicator b:** A comprehensive school safety plan, available on the school's website, contains information related to prevention and intervention strategies, crisis management, response protocols, and communication. During the March 2019 mid-term visit, there was order and routine and no disruptive behaviors in 100% of classrooms. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 98% of parents find the school provides a safe environment. During December 2020 remote observations, students followed directions related to camera on, mute and unmute, and entering breakout rooms and participated in a number of ways (e.g., responding to questions, utilizing the chat feature, providing answers on whiteboards, designating thumbs up or thumbs down).
- **Indicator c:** As described in the renewal application narrative, a dean of students and two school counselors work with staff and students to maintain a safe learning environment and address any reports of harassment or bullying. According to the 2019 CSO survey, nearly 90% of teachers find the school generally free of bullying, discrimination, and harassment for students. Related issues are addressed through completion of DASA forms and further action by the school counselor and administration. All survey respondents identified a DASA coordinator and 100% of teachers confirmed DASA training within the past two years. Information related to discrimination and harassment and DASA reporting is included in the Student Code of Conduct.
- **Indicator d:** According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers describe teacher-student interactions as supportive and respectful. Furthermore, 92% of parents find classroom environments support learning and are generally free from disruption. During the March 2019 mid-term site visit, 100% of classrooms observed were conducive to learning and free from disruptions. Across 14 remote classroom observations in December 2020, the CSO site visit team observed that 100% of classrooms were also conducive to learning with cameras on for all staff and students and active teacher reinforcement of expectations for muting and unmuting.

2. Element: ***Family Engagement and Communication:***
    - **Indicator a:** The renewal application narrative describes a variety of ways families are communicated with and engaged including:
        - Ongoing communication via the school's website, social media platforms, newsletter, and email address;
        - The Family School Association (FSA), which is open to all parents and provides feedback and promotes school activities and family connectedness; and
        - Invitations to take part in family/community events, such as exhibition nights, family fun night, Black history celebration, and community circle.

      Furthermore, the board by-laws stipulate reservation of two seats for parent members, which is confirmed on the board roster. According to the 2020 COVID-19 Parent Survey, 94% of respondents confirmed receipt of a Chromebook (77%) or laptop computer (17%). Furthermore, 77% strongly agree, and an additional 17% somewhat agree that the school provided parents with help to support students' remote learning. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 93% of parents agree there is regular communication and 95% of parents agree the school provides opportunities for participation in school activities.
    - **Indicator b:** According to the renewal application narrative, teachers communicate strengths and needs through the PowerSchool parent portal, Class Dojo, student-led and parent-teacher conferences, quarterly progress reports, and other scheduled meetings and phone conferences. In the 2020 COVID-19 Parent Survey, nearly 90% of respondents report at least weekly contact by the teacher and that they have a clear idea of how the school is educating their children.

Furthermore, according to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers regularly communicate with families on issues related to academics with 98% of parents agreeing that they receive regular and timely information related to their child/children's academic progress.

- **Indicator c:** According to the renewal application narrative, Niagara assesses family and student satisfaction through the use of annual surveys. Summary results from 2019-2020 CSO parent surveys indicate over 90% of parents would recommend Niagara and agree the school is helping reach educational goals and nearly 90% of students agree on the CREW survey they are learning and growing in important ways. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 92% of parents agree the school seeks their feedback through surveys, meetings, or other forums.
- **Indicator d:** The renewal application narrative affirms that the school leadership team immediately reviews any concern and provides a timely response with any further complaints referred to the board and addressed with the formal complaint policy. The complaint policy contains procedural information for submission, investigation, and resolution of complaints to the board of trustees. This policy is available in the policy manual on the school website. According to the 2019 CSO survey, nearly 90% of parents agree the school has a clear complaint policy.
- **Indicator e:** According to the renewal application narrative, academic data are presented and discussed at monthly, public school board meetings, shared at FSA meetings, and posted to the school's website. According to the 2019 CSO survey, while only 75% of teachers agree administrators regularly communicate with families and the community on issues related to academics, nearly 90% of parents agree that they are informed of how the school performs in relation to other schools in the district and NYS.

3. Element: ***Social-Emotional Supports***:
   - **Indicator a:** Niagara employs two full-time counselors and a dean of students who provide individualized social-emotional supports to referred students. Daily schoolwide crew meetings and use of the Second Step program in K-Grade 2 further support relationship building and social-emotional skill development. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree the school has systems in place to support students' social-emotional needs, citing counselor and dean of students support, use of the Second Step curriculum, crew meetings and character targets, and habits of scholarship. The 2019 CSO parent survey confirms their awareness of social and emotional programs with nearly 90% agreeing they are available when needed. Thirty-one percent of parents responding to the 2020 COVID-19 parent survey stated their child has participated in social or emotional counseling. The social-emotional and mental health plan, included in the school's COVID-19 closure plans, includes continued school counselor outreach, the sharing of social-emotional remote learning lessons, and utilization of Zoo Academy in K-Grade 1 to address social-emotional concepts.
   - **Indicator b:** To track early needs of students, kindergarten parents complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Furthermore, Leader in Me surveys are completed annually in Grades 3-6 to assess leadership and life competencies. Results from the 2019-2020 Leadership in Me surveys indicate modeling whole person wellness and family involvement as strengths, and growth mindset and public speaking as areas of focus. During the social-emotional support team focus group, the team described the formation of an Attendance Committee to track chronic absenteeism data bi-weekly and plan interventions as well as the immediate review of any completed parent or staff referral forms to determine appropriate counseling resources and/or supports. In the 2019 CSO survey, 68% of teachers agreed and 26% were unsure if the school collects and uses data to track the social-emotional needs of all students.

- **Indicator c:** According to the renewal application narrative, an annual Student Crew Survey is completed in Grades 2-6 to set goals and learning targets for the following year. Reviewed results from the 2020-2021 survey indicate 90% of students feel they belong in their crew and nearly 85% say they can be honest about their thoughts and opinions in crew. Furthermore, DASA reports are and Leader in Me survey results are used to plan specific social-emotional lessons and build customized learning plans. During the social-emotional support team focus group, and affirmed in the school leadership focus group, counselors create and track individual counseling goals to assess student progress and to inform the intensity of and exit from counseling support.

Benchmark 4: Financial Condition

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

Finding: Meets

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. Unless otherwise indicated, financial data is derived from the school's annual independently audited financial statements which can be found on the NYSED website at http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/csdirectory/CSLaunchPage.html.

- Financial Composite Score
- Working Capital
- Debt to Asset
- Cash Position
- Total Margin

Financial Condition

Niagara Charter School appears to be in very good financial condition as evidenced by performance on key indicators derived from the school's independently audited financial statements.

Overall Financial Outlook

A financial composite score is an overall measure of financial health based on a weighting of primary reserves, equity, and net income. A charter school with a score between 1.5 and 3.0 is generally considered to be in good financial health. Niagara Charter School's 2019-2020 composite score is 3.00.

Composite Scores
2015-2016 to 2019-2020

Year	*Composite Score*
2015-2016	2.80
2016-2017	2.89
2017-2018	2.86
2018-2019	2.95
2019-2020	3.00

Benchmark 5: Financial Management

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.

Finding: Approaches

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:
NYSED CSO reviewed Niagara Charter School's 2019-2020 audited financial statements to determine whether the independent auditor observed sufficient internal controls over financial reporting. The auditor identified a deficiency in internal controls:

The credit card policy in the school's accounting policies and procedures manual requires approval from the Chief Administrative Officer prior to use of the school's credit card. The auditor noted that several credit card purchases did not have proper approval and recommended that the school follow the established policy for credit card usage.

Additionally, in 2018, OSC conducted an audit (https://www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/audits/charter-school/2018/12/21/niagara-charter-school-information-technology-2018m-172) of the school with the objective of determining whether the school's information technology (IT) assets are properly safeguarded and accessed for appropriate purposes. OSC found that personal computer and internet use was found on seven computers; virus scanning was either activated or not up to date on three computers; and sensitive information was not classified and monitored to ensure protection from unauthorized access. OSC recommended that the school provide cybersecurity awareness training to employees; ensure that virus protection is installed, activated and up to date on all computers; and ensure sensitive information is appropriately safeguarded. The school's leadership agreed with the findings and took corrective action.

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 Niagara Board of Trustees consists of seven members, which aligns with the by-laws expectation for between five and 15 board members. According to the board membership table, three of seven board members have served more than ten years and four members joined within the last three years, including two new parent members. As noted in the board roster, board members have education and finance expertise. During the board of trustees focus group, board members noted that increasing community awareness and involvement is a priority following the summer 2019 strategic planning with an eye to developing a pipeline for future board membership.
   - **Indicator b:** The board's strategic plan as updated in August 2019 contains eight AIM categories and associated targets across academic and student success, enrollment, parent and staff satisfaction, financial capacity, and board self-evaluation. During the board of trustees focus group, board members noted that the Governance Committee is responsible for oversight of the strategic plan and determining specific strategies to accomplish the established targets as part of monthly meetings.
   - **Indicator c:** As described in the renewal application narrative, and affirmed during the board focus group, the board provides active oversight through its Academic Committee and Finance Committee. Additionally, a data dashboard is utilized by the board and administration to track outcomes, present on outcomes at board meetings, and guide decision-making related to strategic plan categories and targets. Board minutes further confirm that benchmark assessment

data are reviewed during Academic Committee meetings and that all three committees (Academic, Finance, and Governance) report to the full board at each monthly board meeting.

- **Indicator d:** According to the renewal application narrative, the Governance Committee is responsible for an annual policy review with an updated manual, consolidating all policies and procedures, drafted in July 2019. This manual is available on the school's website. Furthermore, any recommended policy revisions from the Erie I BOCES are reviewed by the school attorney and Governance Committee for any recommended changes to the full board. The school makes use of this policy review service offered by the local BOCES
- **Indicator e:** As confirmed in the board focus group, the board of trustees utilizes a board self-evaluation instrument, which is overseen by the Governance Committee and required of all members. The evaluation instrument contains questions related to attendance and participation as well as strengths, challenges, and goals. Additionally, the board affirmed historically contracting with an outside consultant to annually evaluate the chief academic officer using the Marzano School Leader Evaluation Model with performance in relation to the Model's six dimensions shared with the full board of trustees. Beginning this school year, the evaluation responsibility transitioned to the Academic Committee with quarterly meetings to review progress in relation to goals aligned to Marzano benchmarks.
- **Indicator f:** According to the renewal application narrative, legal counsel advises the board as needed, including ongoing review of compliance with applicable law and conflicts of interest. Furthermore, according to the August 2019 Mid-Term Site Visit Report, and affirmed during the board focus group, the board historically attended trainings through the Northeast Charter Schools Network, in partnership with Charter Board Partners, related to governance best practices, including awareness of legal obligations.

Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity

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.

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. c. The school ensures that staff has requisite skills, expertise, and professional development necessary to meet students' needs. 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. e. The school has mechanisms to solicit teacher feedback and gauge teacher satisfaction.
3. Contractual Relationships ✓*N/A*	a. The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with the management company or comprehensive service provider. b. Changes in the school's charter management or comprehensive service provider contract comply with required charter amendment procedures. c. The school monitors the efficacy of contracted service providers or partners.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 7:

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

- **Indicator a:** According to the renewal application narrative, the administrative team annually develops an EL work plan and prioritized goals, which are shared with staff and revisited throughout the year, along with the school's mission, to support staff commitment to the goals. One hundred percent of teachers agree the mission is clear and shared by all stakeholders and 92% of parents agree they are familiar with the mission as reported in the 2019 CSO survey.

- **Indicator b:** Leadership team members include the chief academic officer, assistant academic officer, achievement coordinator, instructional coach, and dean of students. Such positions are included in the organizational chart with the dean of students reporting to the assistant academic officer, who reports to the chief academic officer, along with the achievement coordinator and instructional coach. During the school leadership focus group, participants articulated roles and responsibilities aligned with the organizational chart.
- **Indicator c:** The renewal application narrative describes multiple avenues for communication to families and staff. For families, information is shared via monthly newsletters, Class Dojo, the school website and social media, monthly community circles, open houses, exhibition nights, and other letters and notices. Furthermore, annual surveys to staff, students, and families are distributed to solicit feedback. During focus groups, school leadership described a close relationship with staff through frequent emails, texts, Google Meets, and open doors when on campus.
- **Indicator d:** As described in the renewal application narrative, Niagara recruits new teachers through advertisement on the school's website, local newspapers, and WNYRIC applicant tracking and utilizes a hiring process that includes a group interview and demonstration of proficiency through sharing sample curricula/work portfolios and facilitating a lesson with students. School leaders also described supporting building substitutes in the same ways as teachers to build a strong internal pipeline. To support increased retention, following 2019 CSO Teacher Survey feedback that the length of school day and year was a reason to seek employment elsewhere, the school submitted a non-material modification to modify its school calendar. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 95% of teachers find Niagara to be a long-term, sustainable option as a place to work. When asked to further explain, teachers cite the close- knit environment, a strong support system, opportunities for professional growth and development, opportunities for teacher input, and putting the students first. Furthermore, the 2019 CSO survey states that 90% of respondents have worked at Niagara in their current grade level for four or more years with 40% at seven or more years.

2. Element: ***Professional Climate:***
   - **Indicator a:** The organizational chart demonstrates adequate staffing in all needed areas, including positions in academics, counseling, business, operations, maintenance and facilities, and community relations. The renewal application narrative also confirms the use of an outside agency to provide human resource services. During the board focus group, board members confirmed that the school is currently fully staffed. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree they have the resources and supports to do their jobs well.
   - **Indicator b:** Multiple structures for collaboration are described in the renewal application narrative, including daily common planning time, daily time after school, monthly EL professional development, and monthly faculty meetings. These collaborative structures are confirmed in the 2019 CSO survey with 95% of teachers also citing frequent collaboration on matters of curriculum and instruction. Leadership also confirmed during the focus group that such times for collaboration continue to occur in the remote setting.
   - **Indicator c:** Teachers participate in ongoing professional development throughout the year through monthly EL professional development, instructional coaching, and external opportunities (e.g., EL institutes, visits to other EL schools, BOCES offerings). As described in the renewal application narrative, annual interest inventories and bi-annual implementation reviews support tailoring professional development to teachers' needs and evaluating its effectiveness.
   - **Indicator d:** According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree a system is in place to monitor and evaluate teacher instruction, citing two informal and formal observations each year

using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The renewal application narrative confirms this and notes that teachers rated ineffective are placed on an improvement plan, which includes supportive action steps and is monitored monthly with the teacher.

- **Indicator e:** Teacher feedback is solicited through an annual school-administered survey, participation on the board Academic and Governance Committees, and ongoing communication. As described in the school leadership focus group, with minimal teacher turnover from 2020 to 2021, Niagara has built a close-knit school community where staff feel comfortable with regularly providing feedback and asking questions. According to the 2019 CSO survey, nearly 90% of teacher agree school leadership has systems in place to solicit staff feedback. Examples cited include staff surveys, emails, meetings, and an open-door policy.

3. Element: ***Contractual Relationships***:
   - **Indicator a:** N/A
   - **Indicator b:** N/A
   - **Indicator c:** The school regularly monitors the efficacy of its partnership with EL Education through ongoing assessment of the alignment between the school's needs and the services provided. Additionally, Niagara participates in an annual partnership satisfaction survey administered by EL Education, which is used to monitor the quality of service as well.

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: ***Missions and Key Design Elements:***
   - **Indicator a:** Niagara's mission statement currently reads as follows: *Niagara Charter School is a project-based learning K-6 school that fosters the unique potential of each child through involvement in original research, critical thinking, and problem-solving, along with development of character and active learning skills*. During board, school leadership, and support team focus groups, the collective group took particular pride in fostering not just academic excellence, but also character and social-emotional skills that will serve students well lifelong. According to the 2019 CSO survey, 100% of teachers agree the mission is clear and shared by all stakeholders and 92% of parents are familiar with the mission. Tenets articulated in the CSO teacher survey include character development, project-based learning, and providing rigorous curricula and lessons that promote critical thinking and problem solving.
   - **Indicator b:** Niagara implements the key design elements outlined in the charter. Through a cooperation agreement with EL Education, an annual EL work plan, and monthly EL professional developments, Niagara demonstrates a commitment to EL Education core practices. Core practices were also evident across 14 remote observations through use of Total Participation Techniques (e.g., whiteboards, equity sticks, fist to five), references to the standards-based learning target, active assessment through questioning, whiteboards, and Google form exit tickets, and a culture of respect and kindness. Habits of Scholarship and P.R.I.D.E. characteristics are highlighted in the parent handbook and on the school website. Furthermore, leadership confirmed that the school is working toward becoming a Leader in Me school to further develop students' leadership and life skills. As affirmed in the school leadership focus group, enrichment and remediation time is built into students' schedules with a particular focus on leveled literacy.

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: Meets

Element	*Indicators*
1. Targets are met	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. Targets are not met	a. The school is making regular and significant annual progress toward meeting the targets. 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. 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.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 9:

1. Element: ***Target are met:***
    - **Indicator a:** Niagara has been at 99% to 100% enrollment from 2014-2015 to the current school year. When enrollment data for the past five years from Niagara is compared to its district of location, the Niagara-Wheatfied Central School District, the charter school has maintained a low differential for SWDs and ELLs, with one exception being a reporting error in 2017-2018. The enrollment of economically disadvantaged students, compared with Niagara Wheatfield, has consistently been over forty percentage points higher. A similar comparison with the primary sending district, Niagara Falls City School District, shows slightly lower, differentials for SWDS, ELLS and EDs. The CSO issued the school a Notice of Deficiency for enrollment of students with disabilities in February of 2019; the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) has since been satisfied.

      The annual report and renewal application describe multiple recruitment efforts in 2019-2020 and plans for 2020-2021, supported largely by the community liaison, which include:
        - Announcements and advertisements in local papers and radio;
        - Distribution of brochures and school information to parents and local businesses and agencies in multiple languages;
        - Scheduled meetings with local pre-K and head start programs;

- In-person and/or virtual school tours throughout the school year; and
- Attendance at in-person and virtual community events.

The school leader provided a link to a virtual tour of the campus that allows a viewer to explore the entirety of the facility, including building layout and individual classrooms. During the school leadership focus group, school leaders noted plans to add video to the virtual tour for sharing information about the school program and to include the link on the school website and in employee email signatures. As described in the renewal application narrative, administration meets with the community liaison to review recruitment efforts and develop new strategies. Furthermore, the school's strategic plan includes targets related to enrollment of SWDs and ELLs in relation to the district of residence. During the board focus group, board members described tracking enrollment within the data dashboard at monthly meetings with board minutes affirming inclusion of a monthly operations dashboard with subgroup enrollment.

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

Element	*Indicators*
1. Legal Compliance	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. b. The school has undertaken appropriate corrective action when needed and has implemented necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements. c. The school has sought Board of Regents and/or Charter School Office approval for significant revisions.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 10:

1. Element: ***Legal Compliance:***
   - **Indicator a:** The school generally complies with the law and the provisions of its charter. Some of the school's policies require revision to be legally compliant. School officials have not been complying with fingerprinting and clearance requirements for staff, a serious safety violation. The school is working with the CSO to adopt a multi-step, comprehensive process to ensure that all school employees have fingerprint clearance prior to their start date at the school. The CSO will continue to work with the school to address other needed policy revisions.
   - **Indicator b:** While the CSO issued the school a Notice of Deficiency in February 2019 for lack of enrolled SWDs, such a Notice was satisfied through implementation of a Corrective Action Plan and an increase in enrollment of SWDs to 19%.
   - **Indicator c:** The school is requesting a material revision to its mission and vision statements to support further alignment to the key design elements of EL Education and the new Leader in Me practices.

Attachment 1: 2020-2021 Renewal Site Visit

Niagara Charter School

Benchmark 1:

Indicator 1: All Schools

1.a.i. Accountability - ESEA Accountability Designation:

This school is designated as a school in Good Standing under current New York State criteria as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

1.b.i. Similar Schools Comparison – Comparative Proficiency:

This school outperform schools with similar grades and subgroup demographics in ELA, math, and science .

Indicator 2: Elementary/Middle School Outcomes

2.a.i. and 2.a.ii. Trending Toward Proficiency – Aggregate and Subgroup Standards-Based Trend Toward Proficiency: See Table 1 below.

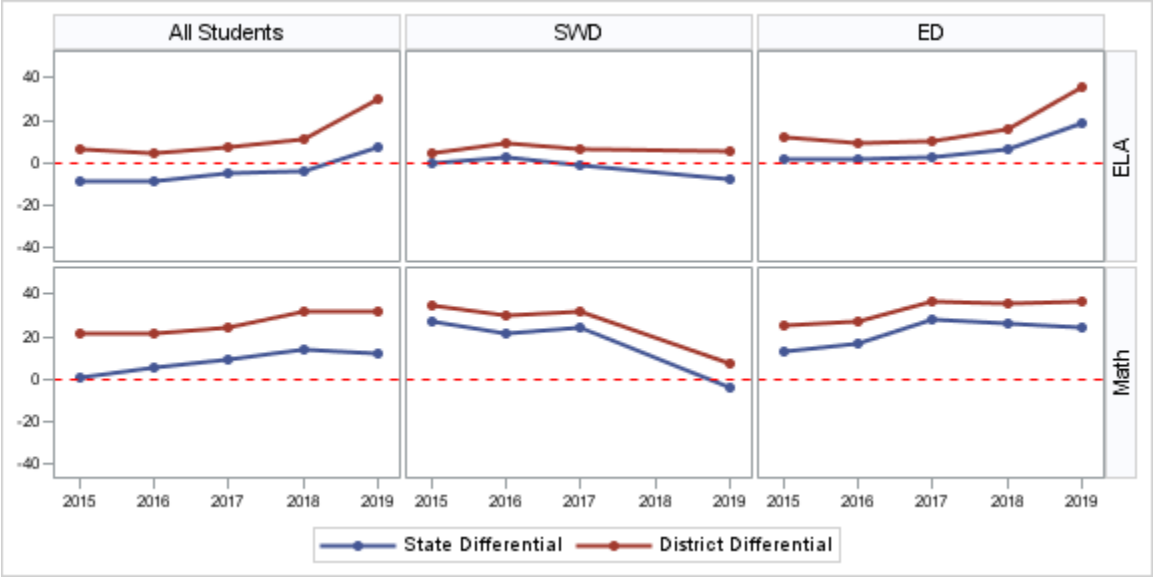
Table 1: Elementary/Middle School Trending Toward Proficiency – Target = 75%

		All Students	SWD	ED
ELA	2015-2016	32%	16%	31%
	2016-2017	41%	47%	40%
	2017-2018	39%	.	38%
	2018-2019	55%	21%	57%
Math	2015-2016	52%	32%	52%
	2016-2017	57%	63%	59%
	2017-2018	62%	.	62%
	2018-2019	68%	33%	70%

**See NOTES (2), (3), (7), and (8) below.*

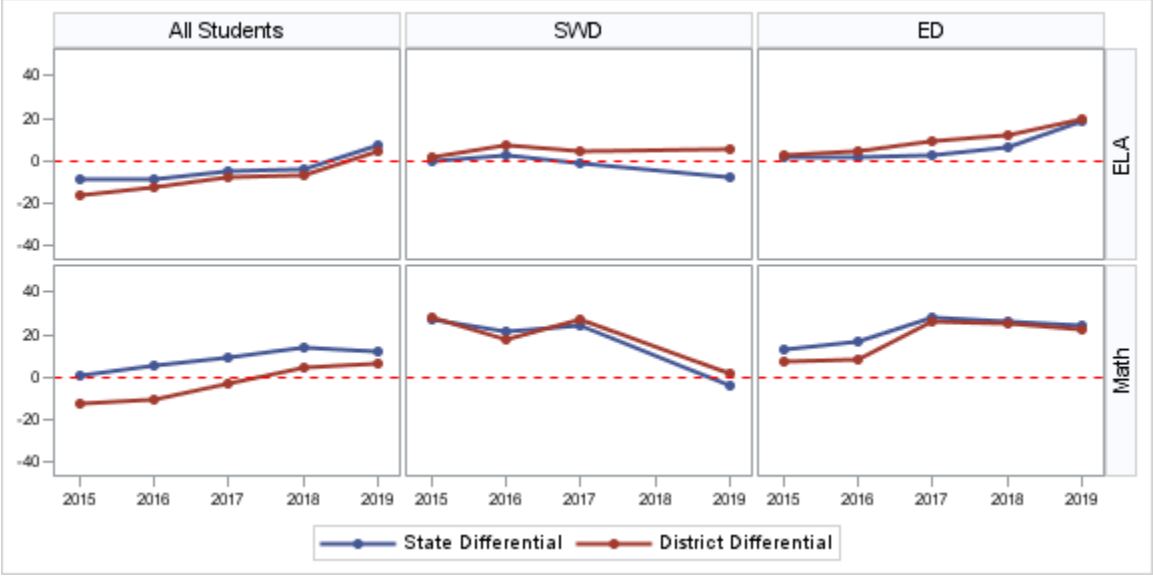
2.b.i. and 2.b.ii Proficiency - Aggregate and Subgroup School Level Proficiency: See Figures 1a and 1b, and Tables 2a and 2b below.

Figure 1a: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency State and District Differentials Over Time Comparison to Niagara Falls City School District



**See NOTES (1), (2), (3), and (6) below.*

Figure 1b: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency State and District Differentials Over Time Comparison to Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District



**See NOTES (1), (2), (3), and (6) below.*

Table 2a: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes: Charter School, District, and NYS

		ELA					Math				
		Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS
All Students	2014-2015	22%	16%	+6	31%	-9	43%	22%	+21	42%	+1
	2015-2016	29%	25%	+4	38%	-9	47%	26%	+21	42%	+5
	2016-2017	33%	26%	+7	38%	-5	53%	29%	+24	44%	+9
	2017-2018	42%	31%	+11	46%	-4	62%	30%	+32	48%	+14
	2018-2019	53%	23%	+30	46%	+7	62%	30%	+32	50%	+12
SWD	2014-2015	7%	3%	+4	7%	0	41%	6%	+35	14%	+27
	2015-2016	13%	4%	+9	10%	+3	36%	6%	+30	15%	+21
	2016-2017	10%	4%	+6	11%	-1	40%	8%	+32	16%	+24
	2018-2019	8%	3%	+5	16%	-8	16%	9%	+7	20%	-4
ED	2014-2015	23%	11%	+12	21%	+2	43%	18%	+25	30%	+13
	2015-2016	29%	20%	+9	27%	+2	48%	21%	+27	31%	+17
	2016-2017	31%	21%	+10	28%	+3	60%	23%	+37	32%	+28
	2017-2018	42%	26%	+16	36%	+6	62%	26%	+36	36%	+26
	2018-2019	55%	19%	+36	36%	+19	63%	26%	+37	39%	+24

**See NOTES (1), (2), (3), (6), and (7) below.*

Table 2b: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes: Charter School, District, and NYS

		ELA					Math				
		Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS
All Students	2014-2015	22%	38%	-16	31%	-9	43%	56%	-13	42%	+1
	2015-2016	29%	42%	-13	38%	-9	47%	58%	-11	42%	+5
	2016-2017	33%	41%	-8	38%	-5	53%	56%	-3	44%	+9
	2017-2018	42%	49%	-7	46%	-4	62%	58%	+4	48%	+14
	2018-2019	53%	49%	+4	46%	+7	62%	56%	+6	50%	+12
SWD	2014-2015	7%	5%	+2	7%	0	41%	13%	+28	14%	+27
	2015-2016	13%	6%	+7	10%	+3	36%	18%	+18	15%	+21
	2016-2017	10%	6%	+4	11%	-1	40%	13%	+27	16%	+24
	2018-2019	8%	3%	+5	16%	-8	16%	14%	+2	20%	-4
ED	2014-2015	23%	20%	+3	21%	+2	43%	36%	+7	30%	+13
	2015-2016	29%	25%	+4	27%	+2	48%	40%	+8	31%	+17
	2016-2017	31%	22%	+9	28%	+3	60%	34%	+26	32%	+28
	2017-2018	42%	30%	+12	36%	+6	62%	37%	+25	36%	+26
	2018-2019	55%	35%	+20	36%	+19	63%	41%	+22	39%	+24

**See NOTES (1), (2), (3), (6), and (7) below.*

2.b.iii. Aggregate Grade Level Proficiency: See Tables 3a and 3b below.

Table 3a: Aggregate Grade Level Proficiency

		ELA					Math				
		Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS
Grade 3	2014-2015	36%	12%	+24	31%	+5	58%	19%	+39	42%	+16
	2015-2016	40%	30%	+10	42%	-2	60%	33%	+27	44%	+16
	2016-2017	61%	26%	+35	43%	+18	63%	32%	+31	48%	+15
	2017-2018	59%	25%	+34	51%	+8	72%	33%	+39	54%	+18
	2018-2019	62%	25%	+37	52%	+10	59%	37%	+22	55%	+4
Grade 4	2014-2015	18%	19%	-1	33%	-15	40%	22%	+18	43%	-3
	2015-2016	31%	25%	+6	41%	-10	51%	26%	+25	45%	+6
	2016-2017	13%	36%	-23	41%	-28	33%	34%	-1	43%	-10
	2017-2018	36%	37%	-1	47%	-11	61%	30%	+31	48%	+13
	2018-2019	59%	22%	+37	48%	+11	71%	34%	+37	50%	+21
Grade 5	2014-2015	13%	15%	-2	30%	-17	19%	26%	-7	43%	-24
	2015-2016	15%	22%	-7	33%	-18	30%	25%	+5	40%	-10
	2016-2017	35%	22%	+13	35%	0	57%	25%	+32	43%	+14
	2017-2018	20%	27%	-7	37%	-17	49%	28%	+21	44%	+5
	2018-2019	32%	19%	+13	38%	-6	54%	22%	+32	46%	+8
Grade 6	2014-2015	22%	16%	+6	31%	-9	57%	22%	+35	39%	+18
	2015-2016	30%	21%	+9	34%	-4	49%	20%	+29	40%	+9
	2016-2017	24%	18%	+6	32%	-8	60%	24%	+36	40%	+20
	2017-2018	51%	36%	+15	49%	+2	63%	26%	+37	44%	+19
	2018-2019	57%	28%	+29	47%	+10	65%	28%	+37	47%	+18

**See NOTES (1), (6), and (7) below.*

Table 3b: Aggregate Grade Level Proficiency

		ELA					Math				
		Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	NYS	Differential to NYS
Grade 3	2014-2015	36%	34%	+2	31%	+5	58%	49%	+9	42%	+16
	2015-2016	40%	51%	-11	42%	-2	60%	57%	+3	44%	+16
	2016-2017	61%	38%	+23	43%	+18	63%	53%	+10	48%	+15
	2017-2018	59%	46%	+13	51%	+8	72%	58%	+14	54%	+18
	2018-2019	62%	48%	+14	52%	+10	59%	58%	+1	55%	+4
Grade 4	2014-2015	18%	40%	-22	33%	-15	40%	52%	-12	43%	-3
	2015-2016	31%	38%	-7	41%	-10	51%	56%	-5	45%	+6
	2016-2017	13%	47%	-34	41%	-28	33%	54%	-21	43%	-10
	2017-2018	36%	41%	-5	47%	-11	61%	50%	+11	48%	+13
	2018-2019	59%	50%	+9	48%	+11	71%	52%	+19	50%	+21
Grade 5	2014-2015	13%	36%	-23	30%	-17	19%	68%	-49	43%	-24
	2015-2016	15%	43%	-28	33%	-18	30%	59%	-29	40%	-10
	2016-2017	35%	39%	-4	35%	0	57%	58%	-1	43%	+14
	2017-2018	20%	42%	-22	37%	-17	49%	59%	-10	44%	+5
	2018-2019	32%	44%	-12	38%	-6	54%	54%	0	46%	+8
Grade 6	2014-2015	22%	43%	-21	31%	-9	57%	56%	+1	39%	+18
	2015-2016	30%	34%	-4	34%	-4	49%	63%	-14	40%	+9
	2016-2017	24%	37%	-13	32%	-8	60%	60%	0	40%	+20
	2017-2018	51%	68%	-17	49%	+2	63%	65%	-2	44%	+19
	2018-2019	57%	53%	+4	47%	+10	65%	61%	+4	47%	+18

**See NOTES (1), (6), and (7) below.*

Indicator 3: High School Outcomes

(Not applicable to this charter school.)

Benchmark 9:

Table 4a: Student Demographics

	SWD			ELL			ED		
	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District
2015-2016	10%	19%	-9	0%	2%	-2	90%	79%	+11
2016-2017	14%	19%	-5	0%	2%	-2	83%	77%	+6
2017-2018	2%	20%	-18	0%	3%	-3	94%	80%	+14
2018-2019	19%	20%	-1	0%	3%	-3	88%	82%	+6
2019-2020	20%	22%	-2	1%	3%	-2	93%	77%	+16

**See NOTES (2) and (6) below.*

Table 4b: Student Demographics

	SWD			ELL			ED		
	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District
2015-2016	10%	13%	-3	0%	1%	-1	90%	42%	+48
2016-2017	14%	14%	0	0%	1%	-1	83%	43%	+40
2017-2018	2%	13%	-11	0%	2%	-2	94%	45%	+49
2018-2019	19%	15%	+4	0%	2%	-2	88%	45%	+43
2019-2020	20%	14%	+6	1%	1%	0	93%	46%	+47

**See NOTES (2) and (6) below.*

Table 5a: Retention – Aggregate and Subgroups

	All Students			SWD			ED		
	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara Falls CSD	Differential to District
2015-2016	79%	91%	**-12**	64%	92%	**-28**	79%	91%	**-12**
2016-2017	83%	91%	**-8**	78%	91%	**-13**	84%	91%	**-7**
2017-2018	83%	92%	**-9**	82%	92%	**-10**	91%	94%	**-3**
2018-2019	85%	91%	**-6**	100%	91%	**+9**	86%	92%	**-6**
2019-2020	85%	90%	**-5**	90%	93%	**-3**	87%	91%	**-4**

**See NOTES (2), (3), and (6) below.*

Table 5b: Retention – Aggregate and Subgroups

	All Students			SWD			ED		
	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District	Niagara CS	Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	Differential to District
2015-2016	79%	94%	**-15**	64%	94%	**-30**	79%	93%	**-14**
2016-2017	83%	92%	**-9**	78%	87%	**-9**	84%	88%	**-4**
2017-2018	83%	92%	**-9**	82%	90%	**-8**	91%	88%	**+3**
2018-2019	85%	94%	**-9**	100%	94%	**+6**	86%	92%	**-6**
2019-2020	85%	93%	**-8**	90%	93%	**-3**	87%	91%	**-4**

**See NOTES (2) and (6) below.*

**NOTES:*

(1) Data in the table above represents tested students who scored proficiently (level 3 or above) on the NYS ELA and/or math assessment.

(2) For the students with disabilities and the ELL/MLL subgroups, both current and former members of the subgroups have been combined.

(3) Pursuant to NYSED business rules, the data was suppressed for subgroups containing <5 students and the subgroup category may not be included for the metric.

(4) Data in the table above represents students who passed the Annual Regents or equivalents (score of 65 or better).

(5) The 4- and 5-year graduation rates reported are as of August. The 6-year graduation rates are as of June.

(6) Data in the table above represents a comparison between those grades served in the charter school to only those same grades in the district.

(7) A "." in any table indicates that the data was suppressed, no student sat for the exam, or the exam was not given.

(8) Data in the table above represents tested students who either maintained a proficient score from one year to the next or students whose proficiency level increased from one year to the next (a proficient score is level 3 or 4).

(9) Data in the table above represents students within their respective subgroups who have passed three out of the five Annual Regents and Regents Common Core Examinations (score of 65 or better) or equivalents.

(10) Data in the table above represents the percentage of students from the original 9th grade cohort who persisted within the same school to a 4-year graduation (includes August graduates).

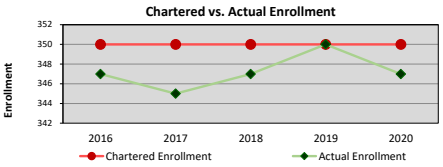
Charter School Fiscal Accountability Summary

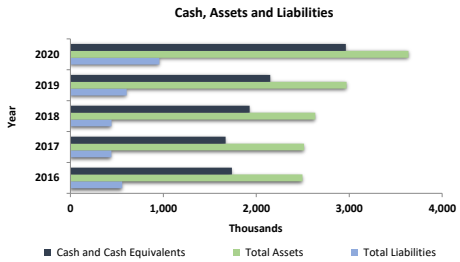
NIAGARA CHARTER SCHOOL

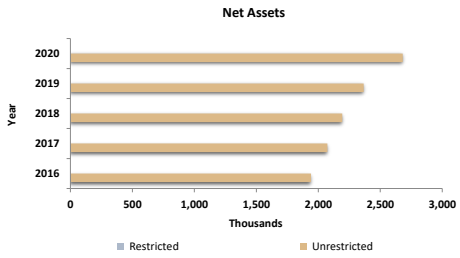
AUDITED FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Grades Served	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6
Maximum Chartered Grades Served	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6
Chartered Enrollment	350	350	350	350	350
Maximum Chartered Enrollment	350	350	350	350	350
Actual Enrollment	347	345	347	350	347
ASSETS					
Current Assets					
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,737,878	1,669,370	1,928,181	2,149,867	2,963,129
Grants and Contracts Receivable	-	-	-	-	-
Prepaid Expenses	-	72,899	63,957	55,076	60,065
Other Current Assets	342,843	384,656	245,147	267,883	136,881
Total Current Assets	2,080,721	2,126,925	2,237,285	2,472,826	3,160,075
Non-Current Assets					
Property, Building and Equipment, net	417,069	386,947	397,733	497,651	478,180
Restricted Cash	-	-	-	-	-
Security Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Other Non-Current Assets	-	-	-	-	-
Total Non - Current Assets	417,069	386,947	397,733	497,651	478,180
Total Assets	2,497,790	2,513,872	2,635,018	2,970,477	3,638,255
LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS					
Current Liabilities					
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	70,275	18,711	55,360	171,320	43,490
Accrued Payroll and Payroll Taxes	486,366	421,610	385,541	433,256	383,968
Due to Related Parties	-	-	-	-	-
Refundable Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Other Current Liabilities	-	-	1,000	-	-
Total Current Liabilities	556,641	440,321	441,901	604,576	427,458
Long-Term Liabilities					
Deferred Rent	-	-	-	-	-
Other Long-Term Liabilities	-	-	-	-	530,085
Total Long-Term Liabilities	-	-	-	-	530,085
Total Liabilities	556,641	440,321	441,901	604,576	957,543
NET ASSETS					
Unrestricted	1,941,149	2,073,551	2,193,117	2,365,901	2,680,712
Restricted	-	-	-	-	-
Total Net Assets	1,941,149	2,073,551	2,193,117	2,365,901	2,680,712
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	2,497,790	2,513,872	2,635,018	2,970,477	3,638,255

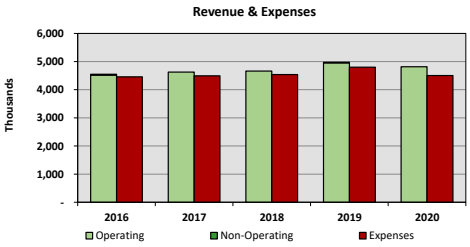


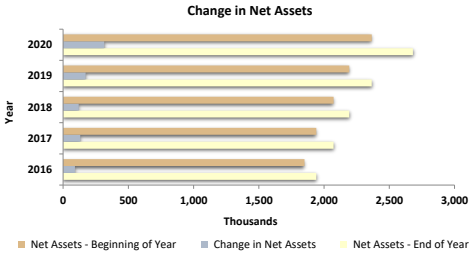




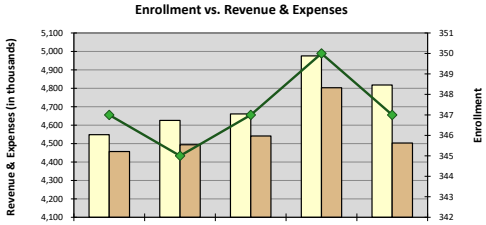
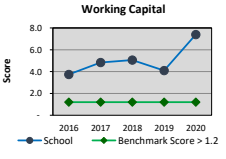
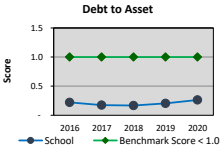
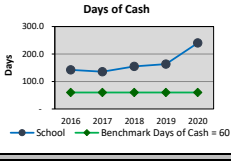
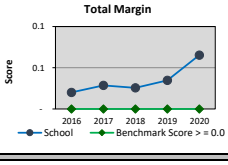
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
OPERATING REVENUE					
State and Local Per Pupil Revenue - Reg. Ed	4,037,936	4,101,719	4,159,126	4,209,102	4,251,110
State and Local Per Pupil Revenue - SPED	202,579	239,420	237,962	279,608	287,669
State and Local Per Pupil Facilities Revenue	50,372	-	190,105	-	-
Federal Grants	230,468	171,381	31,384	301,782	233,017
State and City Grants	-	-	-	-	-
Other Operating Income	-	113,201	41,920	163,156	46,246
Total Operating Revenue	4,521,355	4,625,721	4,660,497	4,953,648	4,818,042
EXPENSES					
Program Services					
Regular Education	3,818,383	-	3,977,952	4,213,888	4,087,785
Special Education	171,479	4,113,943	302,152	318,494	264,622
Other Expenses	-	200,652	-	-	-
Total Program Services	3,989,862	4,314,595	4,280,104	4,532,382	4,352,407
Supporting Services					
Management and General	466,691	178,724	260,827	270,316	150,824
Fundraising	-	-	-	-	-
Total Support Services	466,691	178,724	260,827	270,316	150,824
Total Expenses	4,456,553	4,493,319	4,540,931	4,802,698	4,503,231
Surplus/Deficit from Operations	64,802	132,402	119,566	150,950	314,811
SUPPORT AND OTHER REVENUE					
Interest and Other Income	-	-	-	-	-
Contributions and Grants	8,538	-	-	21,834	-
Fundraising Support	-	-	-	-	-
Other Support and Revenue	18,091	-	-	-	-
Total Support and Other Revenue	26,629	-	-	21,834	-
Change in Net Assets	91,431	132,402	119,566	172,784	314,811
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	1,849,718	1,941,149	2,073,551	2,193,117	2,365,901
Net Assets - End of Year	1,941,149	2,073,551	2,193,117	2,365,901	2,680,712





FISCAL ANALYSIS

RATIOS, BENCHMARKS and FINDINGS

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
REVENUE & EXPENSE BREAKDOWN					
Revenue - Per Pupil					
Operating	13,030	13,408	13,431	14,153	13,885
Support and Other Revenue	77	-	-	62	-
Total Revenue	13,107	13,408	13,431	14,216	13,885
Expenses - Per Pupil					
Program Services	11,498	12,506	12,335	12,950	12,543
Mangement and General, Fundraising	1,345	518	752	772	435
Total Expenses	12,843	13,024	13,086	13,722	12,978
% of Program Services	89.5%	96.0%	94.3%	94.4%	96.7%
% of Management and Other	10.5%	4.0%	5.7%	5.6%	3.3%
% of Revenue Exceeding Expenses	2.1%	2.9%	2.6%	3.6%	7.0%
FINANCIAL COMPOSITE SCORE					
Composite Score	2.80	2.89	2.86	2.95	3.00
BENCHMARK and FINDING: Strong; 1.5 - 3.0 / Adequate; 1.0 - 1.4 / Needs Monitoring; -1.0 - 0.9	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
WORKING CAPITAL					
Net Working Capital	1,524,080	1,686,604	1,795,384	1,868,250	2,732,617
Working Capital (Current) Ratio	3.7	4.8	5.1	4.1	7.4
BENCHMARK and FINDING: Ratio should be equal to or greater than 1.2	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
DEBT TO ASSET					
Debt to Asset Ratio	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
BENCHMARK and FINDING: Ratio should be equal to or less than 1.0	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
CASH POSITION					
Days of Cash	142.3	135.6	155.0	163.4	240.2
BENCHMARK and FINDING: Ratio should be equal to or greater than 60 days	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard
TOTAL MARGIN					
Total Margin Ratio	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
BENCHMARK and FINDING: Ratio should be equal to or greater than 0.0	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Meets Standard