

Western New York Maritime Charter School

Evaluative Comments

Benchmark 1: Student Performance: The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic proficiency, trends toward proficiency, similar schools, college and career readiness, and high school graduation, if applicable. Proficiency at the elementary/middle school level shall be defined as achieving a performance level of 3 or higher on Grade 3-8 state assessments in ELA, math, and science. At the high school level, passing shall be defined as obtaining a Regents exam score of 65 or higher.

WNY Maritime Charter School acknowledges the decline in reported performance from previous years and has identified a Student Information System (SIS) reporting error as a significant contributing factor. Upon discovery of this issue during personnel transitions, the school took immediate corrective action to ensure accurate data reporting moving forward. To prevent similar occurrences, we have implemented enhanced oversight measures, including the appointment of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) dedicated to monitoring and verifying SIS data. This strategic addition ensures that reporting errors are promptly identified and addressed, reinforcing our commitment to data accuracy, transparency, and continuous school improvement.

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 implements research-based practices and has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to New York State Learning Standards 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.

Focus group participants, including school leaders, board members, and student support team members, spoke of implementing a “mastery mindset” instructional approach to address academic concerns. Implementation of this strategy, which focuses on using data to plan for re-teaching, is bolstered by strong support for teachers through coaching, individualized professional development, and leadership- provided opportunities for interactions at grade levels, content areas, and among peers. The instructional program is based on a balance of online learning and teacher-led, project-based learning, according to school leaders. School leaders meet regularly to identify needed supports for teachers, including weekly meetings of management level personnel and a second weekly meeting adding department heads and teacher leaders as preparation for the upcoming week. Curriculum Team Leads/ Instructional Coach, observe classes at least once each week, then participate in department meetings, advocating for teacher needs. Classes that “exhibit excellence” are identified as exemplars for peer teachers, and there are opportunities for cross-class observations. Teachers meet regularly in department and grade level specific meetings, where intervention strategies for students of concern are discussed. The commandant reviews weekly lesson plans prepared on a common template for all but special education teachers. The expectation is for lessons to incorporate state assessment language and academic vocabulary. Differentiated activities are provided for advanced students. Classroom observations consistently demonstrated a high level of student participation and a focus on rigorous vocabulary and problem solving. Professional development is an important component of the instructional program and is a priority for conference days when internal training is correlated with academic needs as identified through teacher evaluations. A post-professional development survey provides feedback from teachers. Internal assessments include Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing twice each year; other local benchmarks are conducted four times each year. The eDoctrina software is used for data analysis; school leaders provide new teachers with training in how to use this the eDoctrina software is used for data analysis; school leaders provide new teachers with training in how to use this tool. WNY Maritime Charter School acknowledges that recent curriculum and teacher planning time adjustments are still in the early stages of implementation. To ensure effectiveness, we are closely monitoring student performance data, gathering teacher feedback, and making adjustments as needed. In order to enhance transparency in the curricular decision-making process we are working to clearly outline the rationale, involving faculty input, and providing structured communication on changes and their intended impact.

Curriculum – Indicator a:

WNYMCS uses New Visions Science Curriculum to address the NYSSLS-Alignment for this as well as scope and sequence curriculum maps that are living documents that are frequently reviewed for pacing.

Curriculum – Indicator d:

WNY Maritime Charter School makes research- and data-driven decisions regarding curriculum review and revision to ensure continuous improvement in student outcomes. Our decision to adjust the middle school curriculum was directly informed by a thorough analysis of State test scores and student performance trends.

Data-Driven Curriculum Revision Process: After reviewing State test scores, school leaders identified specific areas where students required additional support in foundational skills. The school analyzed student performance data alongside nationally recognized research-based instructional frameworks to select a curriculum that provides structured guidance, evidence-based teaching strategies, and improved scaffolding for middle school educators.

Research Supporting Curriculum Selection: The new middle school curriculum was selected based on proven efficacy in increasing student engagement and achievement in similar school settings.

Key factors in the decision included: Alignment with NYS Next Generation Learning Standards
Proven impact on literacy and math achievement in middle school students
Support for differentiated instruction to meet diverse student needs

High School Curriculum & Ongoing Review: In high school, the NYS Next Generation Learning Standards serve as the foundation, and instructional materials are aligned accordingly. The school continuously evaluates classroom materials and instructional strategies through:
Teacher collaboration meetings focused on assessment data and instructional impact.
Professional development sessions that incorporate evidence-based best practices. Annual curriculum audits to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with State standards.

Commitment to Ongoing Evaluation: To enhance transparency, the school is implementing a formalized curriculum review cycle that will document: The research and rationale behind curriculum decisions. The process for reviewing and updating instructional resources. The impact of curricular changes on student performance, measured through internal and external assessments.

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.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator a:

The Board of Trustees conducts an annual self-evaluation of governance performance and oversight, as stated in the renewal application. Additionally, board members utilize a long-standing evaluation form to assess the commandant's performance annually.

During the focus group, board members emphasized that the commandant's evaluation is based on the school's progress in meeting Board of Education requirements and addressing areas where goals have not been met. These performance discussions occur monthly to ensure ongoing oversight. Board members noted that they were not specifically asked to recall or recite the performance standards used for self-evaluation or the commandant's evaluation during the focus group. However, they affirmed that they fully responded to these questions in their annual self-evaluations.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator b:

The WNYMCS Board of Trustees has remained stable throughout the charter term, with only one addition during this period. The board currently consists of seven members, each serving multiple terms ranging from 2 to 17 terms. The renewal application highlights board members' expertise in community relationships, military knowledge, finance, and student recruitment. Multiple members of the board possess extensive legal experience in labor relations. This board member served as the City of Buffalo's Director of Labor Relations, handling contract negotiations, grievance arbitration, discipline and discharge proceedings, and various litigation matters under the NYS Taylor Law, overseeing 4,000 employees across nine labor unions. Additional experience includes roles as Executive Assistant to the Mayor of Buffalo and City Manager in Elmira, NY, with direct involvement in labor-related legal matters. The board is committed to continuous learning and actively engages in professional development opportunities each year to deepen their understanding of educational requirements with the assistance of school leadership on a monthly basis. Additionally, board development is identified as a priority in the strategic plan, and there is an opportunity to further refine the timeline and action steps to support this goal.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator c:

The Board of Trustees actively oversees the school's management through monthly reports from school leaders covering academics, enrollment, and operational systems. Board minutes, publicly available on the school's website, document the topics discussed and decisions made. Contrary to the impression that board members were unaware of retention challenges, the board has been fully informed of the retention rate and has taken proactive measures to address it. Specifically, the board has approved multiple public communication strategies to improve student retention. Additionally, the board's five committees—executive, academics, student recruitment, finance, and scholarships—play an integral role in school oversight. Each committee provides monthly reports, which are incorporated into the board agenda. To further ensure transparency and accuracy in financial oversight, an independent accounting firm briefs

the board monthly. Furthermore, the board has strategically engaged both legal counsel and a human resources firm with extensive charter school experience in the school's market area. These partnerships strengthen the board's capacity to make informed decisions and support the school's operational and academic success.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator d:

The Board of Trustees recognizes the importance of strategic planning and has maintained a stable membership, which has limited the immediate need for active board member recruitment. However, when a board member indicates their intention to step down, the board proactively identifies and recruits a replacement before the transition occurs, ensuring continuity in governance. Regarding school facilities, the board has actively discussed potential relocation options and engaged with a company to explore the feasibility of moving all grades to a single campus. The board is in discussions with a firm to assist with this endeavor. However, a decision was made to postpone further action until the renewal process is complete. The board also actively monitors progress toward strategic plan goals through multiple oversight mechanisms, including monthly reviews of the school's year-to-date operating budget, presentations from the independent accounting firm, and the annual audit. Additionally, board members have regular opportunities to seek clarification and updates from the Commandant, reinforcing their commitment to executing the strategic plan effectively.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator e:

The Board of Trustees actively reviews and updates policies throughout the school year, as reflected in board meeting minutes. Policy revisions recommended by the commandant are thoroughly discussed and approved before submission to NYSED to ensure compliance with state regulations. To support this process, the board has engaged both legal counsel and a human resources firm with extensive experience working with charter schools in the region. Board members are confident that these firms possess the necessary expertise in charter school requirements and regulations. Additionally, the school has an HR company that assists in ensuring compliance with employment laws and best practices. While no board members are attorneys, at least one member has substantial expertise in labor relations and municipal law. This board member served six years as the City of Buffalo's Director of Labor Relations, overseeing labor negotiations, grievance arbitration, discipline and discharge proceedings, and litigation matters under the NYS Taylor Law for 4,000 employees across nine labor unions. Further experience includes executive roles as City Manager in Elmira, NY, and Commissioner of Community Development in Buffalo, managing procurement, public bidding, and compliance with NYS General Municipal Law. As a Board Member of PERMA, a NYS Risk Management and self-insured municipal workers' compensation organization, this member also brings significant knowledge of NYS workers' compensation laws and risk management best practices. With this combination of external expertise and internal experience, the board is well-equipped to make informed decisions regarding policy updates and regulatory compliance.

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator f:

The Board of Trustees actively engages in professional development, as documented in board minutes. Recent sessions have included training on Open Meetings Law and the Dignity for All

Students Act (DASA). Additionally, all board members complete an online course focused on governance responsibilities. The school leader extends invitations to relevant staff training sessions when they may benefit board members understanding of school operations. While the board has not formally documented the impact of these professional development efforts, members consistently seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge and remain informed about best practices in governance

Board Oversight and Governance – Indicator g:

The Board of Trustees maintains a clear distinction between governance and management, as outlined by New York State guidance. Board members focus on strategic planning, policy-making, and oversight while entrusting school leaders with academic and operational decisions. Monthly reports provide updates on key performance measures, including enrollment and retention data, along with specific actions being taken to improve these metrics. Board members regularly review and discuss enrollment and retention data as part of the Commandant's Report at monthly meetings as evidenced by the monthly board minutes posted on the school's website. They remain actively engaged in monitoring progress and evaluating strategies to support continued improvement in these areas. Additionally, while no current board members have a background in education or law, the majority have extensive executive and senior management experience in both private and public sector organizations. They bring strong expertise in governance, financial oversight, and operational leadership and have significant experience in engaging and managing external legal counsel for complex legal matters. Regarding board recruitment, trustees continuously explore potential candidates and follow up regularly with prospective members to ensure continuity and diverse expertise within the board. Moving forward, the board remains committed to strengthening its governance practices and supporting the school's long-term success.

Board Oversight and Governance - Indicator h:

The Board of Trustees structures its meetings using the Charter School Performance Framework as an organizing guide, ensuring alignment with key benchmarks. In alignment with New York State Board regulations, the Board of Trustees focuses on strategic planning, policy-making, and oversight, rather than the day-to-day operations of the school, which are the responsibility of school administration. While board minutes reference these benchmarks, the board's role is to provide high-level oversight, while school leadership is responsible for implementing and tracking progress toward specific indicators and standards. To support academic improvement, the board has taken proactive steps, including approving the hiring of certified teachers and implementing incentives to encourage teacher certification. Additionally, the board has endorsed professional development initiatives. Moving forward, the board remains committed to supporting and evaluating initiatives that align with the school's mission and the Charter School Performance Framework benchmarks.

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. High schools are meeting persistence rates commensurate with the NYSED target.

Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention - Indicator a:

WNY Maritime Charter School acknowledges the challenges in enrollment and retention and has taken aggressive and targeted measures to address these concerns. While historical data reflects lower-than-desired enrollment numbers, we have implemented a strategic and data-driven recruitment and retention plan that is already yielding positive momentum toward meeting the 80% enrollment threshold by the 2025-2026 school year.

1. Strategic Recruitment Efforts

Expanded Community Outreach: Increased presence at local events, middle school fairs, and community meetings to build awareness and engagement with prospective students and families. Strengthened relationships with feeder schools, community organizations, and local youth programs to create clear pipelines for incoming students. Enhanced Marketing and Recruitment Strategies: A revamped digital and social media campaign tailored to highlight the unique opportunities at WNYMCS, including NJROTC leadership training, college and career readiness programs, and personalized student support. Increased multilingual outreach materials and engagement efforts to better connect with English Language Learners (ELL) and their families.

2. Retention & Student Support Enhancements Battalion Formation & Student Engagement Initiatives: The newly implemented Battalion Formation model has already had a positive impact on student culture, engagement, and attendance, addressing a key factor in retention. Targeted Support for At-Risk Students: The school has strengthened its intervention system to better identify and support struggling students early, particularly Students with Disabilities (SWD), ELLs, and Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students. Enhanced wraparound services through mentorship, counseling, and academic support programs ensure that students remain engaged and successful.

3. Data-Driven Approach to Enrollment & Retention Goals Improved Data Reporting and Accuracy: WNYMCS has addressed previous reporting inconsistencies (such as the 2021-2022 ED reporting issue) and has implemented systematic data tracking and verification processes to ensure accurate enrollment and subgroup reporting. Retention Data Analysis & Action Plans: Regular reviews of attendance patterns, exit interviews, and family feedback surveys provide insight into barriers to retention and areas for improvement. Enhanced parent engagement initiatives ensure families feel connected to the school community, fostering long-term commitment.

4. Commitment to Meeting & Exceeding Enrollment Targets

With these strategic, aggressive, and targeted recruitment and retention measures in place, WNYMCS is actively moving toward meeting the 80% enrollment threshold for the 2025-2026 school year and is committed to continuing innovative efforts to ensure long-term growth and sustainability. The school remains dedicated to providing a high-quality educational experience for all students, including SWD, ELL, and ED populations, and will continue to refine its approach to meeting and exceeding these targets.

Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention - Indicator b:

While previous enrollment data has not yet reflected the full impact of WNY Maritime Charter School's enhanced recruitment strategies, the efforts implemented this school year are already showing strong positive trends. The newly defined Recruitment/Engagement Coordinator role has allowed for more targeted outreach, particularly for SWD and ELL students, through community partnerships, direct engagement with families, and expanded bilingual outreach. Enhanced recruitment events, increased drill team demonstrations, expanded athletics, and stronger digital marketing efforts have significantly boosted inquiries and applications. Preliminary enrollment projections for the 2025-2026 school year indicate substantial progress toward reaching the chartered maximum and increasing representation of SWD and ELL students. These strategic efforts are now being realized, positioning WNYMCS for strong enrollment growth and improved subgroup representation in the coming years.

Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention - Indicator c:

WNY Maritime Charter School actively leverages word-of-mouth referrals—our strongest recruitment driver—by implementing structured strategies to optimize its impact and increase enrollment. Alumni & Student Ambassador Program: The school has launched a Student Ambassador and Alumni Engagement Program, where current cadets and graduates share their experiences at community events, feeder schools, and recruitment fairs to attract prospective students. Referral Incentive Initiatives: Families who refer new students are recognized and engaged in recruitment efforts, strengthening their connection to the school community. The school spotlights alumni success stories through social media, newsletters, and open house events to inspire prospective families. Community & Feeder School Outreach: WNYMCS partners with local schools, youth organizations, local church leadership and military/veteran networks to amplify positive word-of-mouth messaging. The leadership team tracks referral data and adjusts marketing efforts accordingly to maximize reach and impact. Through these efforts, WNYMCS is strategically optimizing word-of-mouth referrals to drive sustained enrollment growth and move closer to the chartered maximum.

Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance: The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.

Legal Compliance - Indicator a:

Upon discovery of the issue, immediate corrective actions were taken, including communication with NYSED representatives Janet Klein and Susan Gibbons. In collaboration with our legal team and HR firm, protocols have been implemented to prevent future errors. Compliance is continuously monitored through routine reviews conducted by our legal counsel to ensure adherence to all state and federal regulations.