New York State Education Department

2021-2022 Renewal Site Visit Report for BoR-Authorized Charter Schools under the 2015 Charter School Performance Framework

Exploration Elementary Charter School for Science and Technology

Renewal Site Visit Dates, October 19-20, 2021
Date of Report: January 20, 2022

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ATTACHMENT 1: 2021 NYSED CHARTER SCHOOL INFORMATION DASHBOARD

ATTACHMENT 2: CHARTER SCHOOL FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY DASHBOARD

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Charter School Summary[1]

Name of Charter School	Exploration Elementary Charter School for Science and Technology
Board Chair	Carlos Cong
District of location	Rochester City School District
Opening Date	Fall 2017
Charter Terms	Initial Charter Term:

	2023 school year. The deans of wellness, classroom teachers, and student support staff will be organized by grade bands, K- Grade 2 and Grades 3 - 5. Several new positions will be added – a human resources generalist, a student services coordinator, and a family liaison.

Noteworthy: Exploration Elementary Charter School for Science and Technology (Exploration) makes significant efforts to support students' social and emotional learning (SEL) needs. The school offers an SEL curriculum, employs a wellness team to provide supports, and connects families to external organizations providing wraparound services.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC NOTE: As of the publication of this document, New York State continues to be in the midst of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. NYSED understands that these are challenging times. 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 and administered under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2020-2021 school year (see the applicable memos at Laws, Regulations & Memos | New York State Education Department. Benchmark 1 allows for the use of longitudinal data. 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. NYSED has also implemented a local assessment plan that will supplement, not supplant, state assessment data as per the memo (See Monitoring Plan section).

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-

- **Current school policies, including the discipline policy, complaint policy, enrollment and admissions policy, and by-laws;**
- **NYSED Attachment 1: 2021 NYSED Charter School Information Dashboard;**
- **NYSED Attachment 2: Charter School Fiscal Accountability Summary Dashboard;**
- **Narrative describing the school's progress and efforts made toward reaching its enrollment and retention targets;**
- **Admissions and Waitlist information;**
- **2021-2022 Faculty/Staff Roster;**
- **Fingerprint Clearance Certificates for all instructional and non-instructional staff;**
- **School-submitted Annual Reports during current charter term;**

Summary of Findings

Exploration is in its fifth year of operation and serves students in K - Grade 5. During its current charter term, the school is rated in the following manner: meeting two benchmarks, approaching seven benchmarks, and falling far below one benchmark.

The school enrolled third graders for the first time in the 2019-2020 school year, and the NYS state assessments were not administered that year. The school administered select state assessments to its third and fourth graders in the spring of 2021. The participation rates were 37% for ELA, 36% for math, and 5% for science. Proficiency percentages were 30% for ELA, 6% for math, and 20% for science. The school administered local assessments in ELA and math to its students in the spring of 2021. Participation rates were 87% for ELA and 83% for math. The proficiency rates were 30% for ELA and 18% for math. This information is not used for rating purposes by the CSO.

- **Summary of Areas of Growth and Strengths**:
  - The school has improved its rating for the Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement benchmark. Exploration has made significant efforts to establish a program that supports the social-emotional and mental health needs of its students, employing a variety of restorative practices to address both behavior and student social-emotional well-being. The school uses several methods to engage families and the community in student learning, including a family visit program, employing a family liaison, and partnering with EnCompass Learning. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program and modifies the program accordingly.

- **Summary of Areas in Need of Improvement**:
  - Despite a common expectation of differentiated and rigorous instruction, lessons are not rigorous enough to ensure students perform at grade level or remediate due to the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impacts on learning. Leaders acknowledged a negative impact on academic performance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic but have not yet begun administering interventions based on the current year's data, limiting supports for students in the general education program. Exploration continues to experience staffing vacancies, which prevent the school from enrolling students from its waitlist. Student attrition has led to budgetary changes. The school continues to struggle to enroll a comparable number of economically disadvantaged (ED) students, students with disabilities (SWDs), and English language learners (ELLs) in relation to the district of location. In the final year of its initial charter term, the board remains in the beginning stages of implementing its strategic plan.

Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning

separate resource room. In the focus group, intervention teachers reported that general education teachers provide students with Tier 1 interventions during whole class and small group instruction. At the time of the remote renewal site visit, special education teachers and interventionists were using i-Ready assessment results from the previous school year to pull students for Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention Despite leaders acknowledging a negative impact on academic performance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school had not yet begun administering interventions based on the current year's data, limiting supports for students in the

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Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement

Finding: Meets

	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.
	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.
	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:

Over this charter term, the trajectory with regard to this benchmark has been positive. The school has improved its rating from Approaches to Meets. Exploration has made significant efforts to establish a program that supports the social-emotional and mental health needs of its students, employing a variety of restorative practices to address both behavior and student social-emotional well-being. In the school year 2018-2019 the school was designated as "potentially persistently dangerous" but that designation was discontinued the following year.

1. Element: ***Behavior Management and Safety:***
    - **Indicator a:** Exploration has a clear approach to behavioral management, although it has not posted its discipline policy on its website. According to the renewal application, Exploration's behavior management approach includes Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and restorative practices. Exploration's discipline policy document submitted with the renewal application

Benchmark 4: Financial Condition

Finding: Approaches

Over this charter term, the trajectory with regard to this benchmark has been improving, with a prior rating from the mid-term site visit report of Falls far Below.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 4:

See the school's fiscal dashboard attached to the end of this report (Charter School Fiscal Accountability Summary). The fiscal dashboard provides detailed information regarding the school's compliance with Benchmark 4 of the Charter School Performance Framework. Unless otherwise indicated, financial data i

- **Indicator b:** In the final year of its initial charter term, the board remains in the beginning stages of implementing its strategic plan. Board members reported that the board participates in an annual retreat during the summer facilitated by an external consultant. The board is now partnering with Board on Track to engage in training sessions, webinars, and other development for the board and its five committees. According to the renewal application, the board and school leader participated in a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis during summer 2021 to engage in strategic planning and goal setting. The board's strategic plan indicates goals related to the academic benchmarks (Benchmarks 1, 2, and 3) and for board oversight andstd69 (m)--6 (r)-

board will contract with Board on Track to provide professional development to ensure the board is prepared to meet all governance responsibilities, school laws, and organization goals.

seek input on future professional development topics. Two-thirds of teachers (12 of 18) responding to the CSO 2021 Teacher Survey agreed that the school ensures staff has the requisite skills necessary to meet all students' needs.

- **Indicator d:** Although the school has a formal process for teacher evaluation, leaders do not establish high expectations for instructional quality. School leaders reported that they conduct annual formal evaluations for teaching staff using the Danielson rubric. In addition to this, the renewal application indicated that school leaders conduct

Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements

Finding: Approaches

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:

Over this charter term, the trajectory with regard to this benchmark has been constant. The school has maintained its rating of Approaches. Exploration has put structures in place to address key design

Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention

Finding: Falls Far Below

	a. The school maintains sufficient enrollment demand for the school to meet or come close to meeting the enrollment plan outlined in the charter.
	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:

Over this charter term, the trajectory with regard to this benchmark has been constant. The school has maintained its rating of Falls Far Below. Exploration continues to struggle to recruit a student body that is representative of the Rochester CSD. The differentials between the school and district's percent of ELLs and SWDs has steadily increased. Further, Exploration has been unable to retain its students at a rate comparable to the district of location.

1. Element: ***Target are met:***
   - **Indicator a: N/A**
2. Element: ***Targets are not met:***
   - **Indicator a:** As of 2019-2020, the school was at 90% enrollment, an increase from the previous year in which the school was at 84% of its maximum authorized enrollment. In the 2020-2021 school year, Exploration was at 85% of its maximized authorized enrollment, which dropped further by the time of the visit to 74%. The school has not made progress toward meeting the targets for enrolling students in targeted populations similar to the population in Rochester CSD. As shown in Attachment 1, the school enrolls 10 percentage points fewer SWDs and 15 percentage points fewer ELLs than the Rochester CSD. Exploration's ED student enrollment is 36 percentage points below the Rochester CSD. These differences have steadily increased over the

counsel to track its legal obligations. The school reported subgroup enrollment in 2019-2020 having a -8 percentage point differential to the district for SWDs, -12 percentage points for ELLs, and -3 percentage points for EDs. In the subsequent year, 2020-2021, those percentage point differentials had all increased with SWDs to -10, ELLs to -15, and EDs to -36 percentage point differentials.

- **Indicator c:** The school has requested significant changes to the organization chart to be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year, yet has implemented them without approval. Additionally, the school conducted a summer school session in 2021 without authorization from the CSO. The school is not allowed to implement any changes to its charter without written approval from the CSO or the Board of Regents.

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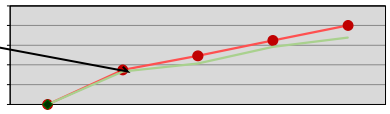

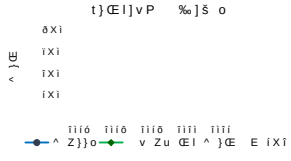
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