



Renewal Report
ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School (325)

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REPORT INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Report

The renewal report is a summary of findings and a resulting recommendation regarding renewal of the charter or contract for an operator-run school. To inform this recommendation, Baltimore City Public Schools collects and analyzes documentation including the school's renewal application, and an evaluation of the school's performance based on the renewal rubric, the School Effectiveness Review (SER) performed on site at each school and consideration of all other relevant information.

City Schools' renewal criteria are based on state law (§ 9-101, *et seq.*, MD. CODE ANN., EDUC.) and Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners' policy IHBJ and associated administrative regulations (IHBJ-RA and JFA-RA). The Board's policy requires that schools up for renewal be evaluated on multiple measures including, but not limited to, the following:

- **Student achievement**, constituting at least 50 percent of the renewal score and including measures such as schoolwide performance on state assessments, College and Career Readiness (for schools with high school grades), academic programming for special student populations, and a school's fidelity to its charter
- **School climate** (chronic absence, suspensions, enrollment trends, school choice data, and school survey results from parents, teachers, and students)
- **Financial management and governance** (annual audits, school budget submissions, grants management, board documentation; compliance/adherence with federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations)
- An overall finding of not effective in any of the key areas (Student Achievement, School Climate, or Financial Management/Governance) may be the basis of a non-renewal decision.

The renewal process is a component of City Schools' annual review of its schools, designed to ensure that students and families across the district have access to school options that meet their interests and needs. The framework was originally developed in 2011 by the Renewal Stakeholders Working Group (composed of school operators from a range of school types, Supporting Public Schools of Choice, and the Maryland Charter School Network) who worked to develop a methodology for evaluating the performance of operator-run schools. The result: a fair, transparent, and rigorous renewal framework that reflects schools' unique nature and innovative contributions to student achievement, used for the first time in the 2012-13 school year, and a process for reviewing and updating the framework each year.

At the conclusion of each year's renewal cycle, staff engages operators and other key stakeholders in a review of the process to identify areas for improvement that could be addressed while still maintaining a level of predictability for schools up for renewal in the following year.

The Process

Based on recommendation of staff and feedback from school operators and other stakeholders following the normal feedback and review cycle, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners approved a modified renewal process for school year 2021-22. This modified process was designed to take into considerations the lingering impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on student data while still holding operators accountable to delivering strong programs for students. This year's process takes a focused look at data in the key areas (Student Achievement, School Climate and Effective Financial Management and Governance). Since the scope of certain data items like state assessments is limited, the Board approved modifications so that the only terms schools will be eligible for are either a three-year renewal term or non-renewal¹. Non-renewal recommendations will be considered for schools where the evidence indicates serious financial sustainability concerns, or inability to comply with critical state, federal and local guidelines that places students, staff or the district at risk. Thus, schools that earn a "Not Effective" rating in any of the following metrics will be recommended for non-renewal by the Charter and Operator-Led Schools Advisory Board to the CEO:

- Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities,
- Audit Content, Internal Controls,
- Operator Capacity, or
- Strategic Leadership/Governance (All of Domain 4 from SER).

If a school is considered for non-renewal based on any of these four metrics, the Board will also consider the school's record of renewal and academic performance, as measured in the Academic Success section of the renewal rubric, in making its renewal decision.

In addition to determining the renewal or non-renewal of a school's contract, the renewal process informs the Board and the public on the efficacy of school performance and practices, as well as helping identify areas for growth in schools' planning for their next contract term.

The revised process continues to use the following components:

- Renewal Rubric (Updated to reflect the above changes)
- Application for Renewal
- Data Tables prepared by City Schools
- School Effectiveness Review (Streamlined to include fewer key actions in metrics used in the School Climate section of the renewal rubric)

¹ In the modified renewal process for 2021-22, schools will not be eligible for a 5-year term or 8-year "extended" term. However, the outcome of the 2021-22 renewal process will allow schools to earn progress towards an extended renewal term in the future. According to Board Policy IHBJ – Public Charter Schools, "A public charter school shall only be eligible for an extended renewal term if the school has two or more consecutive full renewals, including demonstrating quality programming for all student groups." For the 2021-22 renewal process, a school that receives "Meets Expectations", "Effective" or "Highly Effective" in each of the four metrics that could lead to non-renewal listed above, as well as "Effective" or "Highly Effective" in the overall Academics section, will be considered to have earned a full renewal for their progress towards an 8-year extended renewal in future renewal processes.

The process starts with a review by the Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board, whose members represent foundations, nonprofit organizations, school choice advocates, school operators, and district representatives; and whose function is to provide advice to the CEO on renewal and other issues as they relate to operator-led schools. In performing its review, the Advisory Board looks at all data and information, both quantitative and qualitative, to make sound recommendations to the CEO. After its review of the components above, the Advisory Board makes recommendations to City Schools’ CEO on whether charters or contracts should be renewed. The CEO considers the recommendations and the quantitative and qualitative review, and then makes her own recommendation to the Board. In some instances, the nature or severity of an issue raised during the renewal process is serious enough to give it extra weight in formulating the renewal recommendation and, ultimately, the renewal decision, especially in instances where the issue affects the wellbeing of students, staff, or the district as a whole.

The ultimate decision on all operator renewals rests with the Board, which considers the recommendations and rationale of the CEO, the operator renewal report, testimony given at public Board meetings and work sessions, the contents of the official record and the factors listed in policy IHBJ and administrative regulation IHBJ-RA for charter schools, and policy FCA and administrative regulation FCA-RA for non-charter schools. This includes the Board’s ability to consider prior partial renewal terms afforded to operators who have had serious challenges in the prior renewal that remain issues that continue to affect the wellbeing of students, staff, or the district as a whole based on evidence in this renewal process. In particular, as Policy IHBJ states, “[t]he Board may decide that a public charter school is not eligible for two consecutive partial renewals.”

Actions	Timeline
Schools submit renewal applications	September 2, 2021
Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board reviews renewal applications and makes recommendations to the CEO	September to October 2021
District presents recommendations to Board at public meeting	November 9, 2021
Work Session for operator to provide oral testimony to Board in a meeting open to the public	December 9, 2021
Board votes on renewal recommendations	January 11, 2022

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Operator: Baltimore Teacher Network
Configuration: Middle/High
Type: Charter
Enrollment: 532²

Recommendation

3-year renewal

Discussion

On January 11, 2022, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to renew the contract with the Baltimore Teacher Network. to operate ConneXions: A Community Based Art School for a three-year term running from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025, with conditions on improving academic achievement and outcomes for students, as well as raising the school's graduation rate.

The school was rated “Developing” in Audits/Internal Controls, “Developing” in Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities, “Developing” in Operator Capacity, “Developing” in Strategic Leadership/Governance, and “Not Effective” in Academics overall.

While there are some areas of strength, academic performance at ConneXions is an area of improvement for the school. The state performance ratings are based on the most recent years when the state assessment was given which are for school years 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19. For PARCC absolute performance (2018-19), schools are compared to schools with similar levels of students considered economically disadvantaged (ED) because absolute performance on assessments is highly correlated to the relative wealth of student populations. ConneXions is rated “Not Effective” in both ELA 6-8 and Algebra 1 absolute performance (ELA 6-8: 36th percentile, Algebra 1: 18th percentile; “Developing” in Math 6-8 absolute performance (59th percentile); and “Highly Effective” in ELA 10 absolute performance (91st percentile). In PARCC growth performance, which looks at the extent to which a school can improve individual student performance year to year over the three-year period considered the school was rated “Not Effective” in ELA 6-8 (20th percentile overall) and “Not Effective” in Math 6-8 (41st percentile). The school was rated “Not Effective” in College and Career Readiness, which considers participation and success in career and college indicators (e.g., SAT, Advanced Placement, and Career and Technical Education) and enrollment in college. While the school offers some AP courses (31% of the class of 2020 participated in AP) and has strong SAT participation (where 92.9% of the class of 2020 participated), there are not enough other offerings to prepare students for college and career and the school needs to improve success in this area. While the

² Total enrollment counts reflect the MSDE official enrollment file for grades k-12, which includes students enrolled on September 30 each year. This file is verified by MSDE prior to becoming the official enrollment count for the year.

school was rated “Not Effective” in 4-year Cohort Graduation Rate, with a three-year average of 69% of diploma-track seniors graduating within four years of entry to high school over the years 2018-2020, the school improved its graduation rate from 60% in 2019 to 73.3% in 2020.

The school was rated “Developing” in Fidelity to Charter. The school is *implementing the mission expressed in its charter application*³. The school’s mission to “cultivate academic and artistic excellence, cultural identity and community awareness in students” is evident in the school’s programming which provides daily, culturally relevant arts programming to students, and is enhanced with partnerships with local arts organizations. Where the school is developing in this measure is ensuring that the programming is delivered at a high quality and in its use of data to address challenges. While *the school has begun to gather data to assess its efficacy and has begun to develop and implement strategies to address any challenges evident in the data, particularly in the areas of student performance, enrollment, student attendance, dropout rates, attrition and student choice data/school demand, these strategies have not yet been proven effective*. Even though the school tracks data in several ways, including use of the NWEA assessment and partnering with ANet who provide staff to assist teachers in analyzing data, there is currently no formal data cycle in place. In recognition of the need to use data more effectively and consistently to impact the academic outcomes of students, the school has hired a new staff member to support the implementation of a data cycle. The school also implements several strategies to improve student outcomes including use of online platforms (such as Moby Max, Prodigy, and Achieve 3000) and providing students with after school tutoring through FEV Tutors. In the climate indicators, the school has strengths. The school’s attendance is higher than the district average and its chronic absence is significantly lower than the district average. The school uses PBIS and targets support with a focus on early intervention to achieve these results.

The school was rated “Developing” in Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities. Evidence shows the school *“is working towards a trajectory of growth, is aware of its data and responsibilities to students with disabilities, and has implemented processes, interventions and strategies to support student outcomes including to address any gaps in the data as it relates to performance and climate metrics for students with disabilities over time over the course of the contract but in some instances has struggled to take measures that are appropriate and sufficient. The school has taken steps to remedy such shortcomings.”* Academic performance for students with disabilities is mixed: performance has decreased in ELA 10; remained largely the same in Algebra 1; and increased in math 6-8 and ELA 6-8. In measuring the school’s trajectory of growth, attendance decreased slightly in grades 6-8 but increased in 9-12. Chronic absences have gone down but are still higher than the rate for general education students in middle grades. The school has made significant progress in reducing the suspension rate for students with disabilities (from 14.5 in 2017-18 to 4.0 in 2019-20). An audit of school practices conducted by the Office of Special Education showed the school generally provides appropriate services to

³ Text in italics is quoted from the 2021-22 operator renewal rubric

students with disabilities and only has only minor compliance issues, primarily due to clerical errors.

For more information on school practices, please also see the school’s School Effectiveness Report available at www.baltimorecityschools.org.

Findings (Middle/High school rubric)

Category 1. Has the school followed sufficient financial management and governance practices? Has the school had challenges with meeting critical district, state or federal guidelines? Has the school delivered strong academic programming for students with disabilities that demonstrates a trajectory of growth? Has the school provided strategic leadership and governance?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
1.1 Audit Content, Internal Controls	The extent to which the school's Independent Auditor's Reports offer unqualified opinions and no management points in each of the years of the charter term. The extent to which statements of cash flow and ratio of assets to liabilities indicate that the operator has strong performance on their short-term liquidity measure.	Developing
1.2 Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities	The extent to which the school has a demonstrated a strong trajectory of growth, is aware of its data and responsibilities to students with disabilities, does not have any gaps or has decreased gaps in the data as it relates to performance and climate metrics for students with disabilities over time, and has effectively and consistently implemented processes, interventions and strategies to support student outcomes over the course of the contract.	Developing
1.3 Operator Capacity	The extent to which the school has operated effectively, and the operator has consistently met all state, federal reporting requirements critical District or federal obligations and has not received any Notices of Concern or Notices of Reprimand during the contract period. (Evidence that may be considered includes compliance with state or federal reporting requirements, budget submissions and monitoring reports, quarterly reports, and the relative number, frequency and severity of Notices of Concern or Notices of Reprimand.)	Developing
1.4 Strategic Leadership/Governance	School Effectiveness Review Score - Strategic Leadership	Developing
There is no overall rating for this section as each metric is considered individually.		

Category 2. Is the school an academic success?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
2.1 Absolute Student Achievement	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	Not Effective
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	Developing
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA 10	Highly Effective
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Algebra I	Not Effective
2.2 Student Achievement Trend	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	Not Effective
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	Effective
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA 10	Highly Effective
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Algebra I	Not Effective
2.3 Student Achievement Growth	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	Not Effective
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	Not Effective
2.4 College and Career Readiness	Participation and Success in indicators of college and career readiness; College Enrollment within 16 months of graduation	Not Effective
2.5 Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall	The extent to which the school has fully implemented the mission expressed in its charter application and this mission is clear to all stakeholders. The extent to which the school has delivered high quality programming for all student subgroups. The extent to which the school is gathering data to assess its efficacy and has effectively addressed any challenges evident in the data, particularly in the areas of subgroup performance, enrollment, student attendance, dropout rates, attrition and student choice data/school demand.	Developing
2.6 Student Graduation Rate: 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Percent of diploma-track students who graduated from City Schools with their freshman-year cohort, averaged over school years 2018-2020	Not Effective
Academics Overall Rating		Not Effective

Category 3. Does the school have a strong climate?

As part of the modified renewal process for 2021-22, Domains 1-3 of the School Effectiveness Review (SER), which are considered in the Climate section of the renewal rubric, were modified and abbreviated. These domains did not receive overall ratings and are summarized below. For more information on the efficacy of school practice in these domains please see the full SER report available on the district website at <https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/renewal>.

Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction		
Domain	Description	Rating
1.1	School leadership supports highly effective instruction.	Effective
1.2	Teachers use multiple data sources to adjust practice.	Not Rated
1.3	Teachers deliver highly effective instruction.	Effective
1.4	Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching, and learning can occur.	Not rated

Domain 2: Talented People		
Domain	Description	Rating
2.1	The school implements systems to select effective teachers and staff whose skills and beliefs meet the needs of the school.	Not Rated
2.2	The school develops teacher and staff capacity through individualized support and professional development.	Effective

Domain 3: Vision and Engagement		
Domain	Description	Rating
3.1	The school has a clear vision and mission that promotes a student-centered, culturally relevant learning that prepares students for future success.	Effective

3.2	The school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families and the community.	Effective
3.3	The climate and culture of the school creates a welcoming learning environment that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student.	Not Rated