BALTIMORE CITY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Renewal Report
City Neighbors Charter School (326)

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-renewal[1]. 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)

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[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

City Neighbors Charter School #326

>*Operator:* City Neighbors Charter School, Inc.
>*Configuration:* Elementary/Middle
>*Type:* Charter
>*Enrollment:* 233[2]

Recommendation

3-year renewal

Discussion

On January 11, 2022, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to renew the contract with City Neighbors Charter School, Inc. to operate City Neighbors Charter School for a three-year term running from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025, with conditions to address differences in achievement of students in different racial and ethnic groups and improve outcomes for students in lower performing groups.

The school was rated "Meets Expectations" in Audits/Internal Controls, "Effective" in Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities, "Developing" in Operator Capacity, "Highly Effective" in Strategic Leadership/Governance, and "Developing" in Academics overall.

City Neighbors Charter School was rated "Effective" in Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall, indicating that "*the school has implemented the mission expressed in its charter application and mission is clear to most stakeholders.*" City Neighbors' mission is expressed clearly in its application and is evident in the implementation of Project-Based Learning, Arts Integration, Restorative Practices and the school's Social/Emotional Learning programming. This has led to a positive school climate that attracts students and encourages them to come to school regularly, as shown by the school's strong recruitment and enrollment trends, high attendance and low chronic absence rates, as well as a high cohort retention rate. Cohort retention is a measure which measures the percentage of students who stay at the school at least two years after their initial entry and is an indicator of students' and families' satisfaction with the school. The school's application also presents evidence showing a high level of parental involvement in school life and in decision making regarding the direction of 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. Academic performance at City Neighbor Charter School is a major area of growth for the school. City Neighbors is rated "Not

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[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.

Effective" in ELA and math absolute performance at both the elementary and middle grade levels (ELA 3-5: 24th percentile, math 3-5: 32nd percentile, ELA 6-8: 46th percentile, math 6-8: 41st 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 3-5 (29th percentile overall) and "Developing" in Math 3-5 (56th percentile). In middle grades, Math 6-8 is also rated as "Developing" in the 52nd percentile and "Highly Effective" in ELA 6-8 (87th percentile). Thus, in many of the assessment measures the school's performance is well below or just slightly above the district average; the school must continue to take steps to improve student performance. Some of the more recent steps the school has taken to address these challenges include hiring an intervention teacher in 2019, becoming a Universal Design for Instruction School, intensifying its data cycle review process and use of inventions including multi-age targeted instruction during the school day as well as in the summer and after school.

The school was rated "Developing" in Effective Programming for All Student Racial/Ethnic Groups. This measure considers in part whether a school is "*Making progress in delivering quality programming for all student racial groups and is aware of its data for all student groups." While the school has implemented some instructional approaches, processes and practices that the school believes will decrease achievement gaps, these strategies have not yet been proven effective as shown in the school's data for different student groups*[3]. City Neighbors' application described processes and practices the school has implemented, such as the school's Equity Plan, professional development on anti-racist teaching, and goals to increase staff diversity. While the school is still working towards achieving goals laid out in its Equity Plan, further progress must be made, as gaps in achievement data between black and white students are evident in the data and the student performance of black and white students respectively is very mixed with the gap in performance widening in 2018-19 in the three areas considered. The school's application does not provide evidence of how exactly the school's work in this area is working to inform classroom instruction and improve outcomes and so continued focus is needed here.

The school was rated "Effective" in Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities. Evidence shows the school has "*demonstrated a trajectory of growth, is aware of its data and responsibilities to students with disabilities, has minimum gaps or has decreased gaps in the data as it relates to performance and climate metrics for students with disabilities over time, and has generally implemented appropriate processes, interventions and strategies to support student outcomes over the course of the contract.*" The school has implemented effective strategies for behavioral interventions for students with disabilities, has created an inclusive atmosphere for students and, as with its overall school population, climate data for students with disabilities at the school is strong in the areas of attendance and chronic absence. Academically, students with disabilities are showing a trajectory of growth, with scale scores and proficiency rising for this population. In addition, an audit of school practices conducted by the Office of Special Education showed the

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[3] Text in italics is quoted from the 2021-22 Operator Renewal Rubric

school has strong practices in place that ensure students with disabilities are receiving appropriate instruction and services.

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

Findings (Elementary/Middle 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 will 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.	**Meets Expectations**
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.	**Effective**
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	**Highly Effective**
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 3-5)	**Not Effective**
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	**Not Effective**
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	**Not Effective**
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	**Not Effective**
2.2 Student Achievement Trend	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	**Not Effective**
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	**Highly Effective**
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	**Developing**
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	**Not Effective**
2.3 Student Achievement Growth	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	**Not Effective**
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	**Developing**
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	**Highly Effective**
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	**Developing**
2.4 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.	**Effective**
2.5 Effective Programming for All Student Racial/Ethnic Groups	The extent to which the school has provided high quality programming for students in all racial/ethnic groups. The extent to which the school has instructional approaches, processes and practices in place that seek to ensure students in all groups achieve and to address gaps in achievement between student groups.	**Developing**
Academics Overall Rating		**Developing**

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. The SER for City Neighbors Charter School was conducting in SY2019-20 prior to the closure of schools due to Covid-19 and move to virtual learning. Therefore, this school received ratings for all Key Actions. 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.	**Effective**
1.3	Teachers deliver highly effective instruction.	**Highly Effective**
1.4	Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching, and learning can occur.	**Highly Effective**

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.	**Highly Effective**
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.	**Highly 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.	**Effective**