



## **Operator Renewal Report Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys #375**

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## **REPORT INTRODUCTION**

### ***Purpose of the Report***

The renewal recommendation report is a summary of findings regarding renewal of the charter or contract for an operator-run school, and the resulting renewal recommendation. Baltimore City Public Schools (“City 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, the 5Essentials Student and Teacher Survey Report, 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 (“Board”), Policy IHBJ and associated administrative regulations (IHBJ-RA and JFA-RA). Board Policy IHBJ requires that schools up for renewal be evaluated on multiple measures including, but not limited to, the following:

- **Student achievement** (performance on state assessments, growth measures/value added measures, unique indicators, academic programming for special student populations and a school’s fidelity to its charter or contract)
- **School climate** (chronic absence, suspensions, enrollment trends, school choice data, and school survey results)
- **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, the Maryland Charter School Network, and district staff) 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 most recent round of review considered the transition from the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (“PARCC”) to the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (“MCAP”), as well as the lack of state assessment data for school years 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Key changes made to the framework as a result of this most recent review include the following:

- The timeline of the renewal process has been extended so that 2021-22 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) scores could be considered prior to renewal recommendations being made. MCAP scores were released by the Maryland State Department of Education (“MSDE”) in January 2023. MCAP data is considered in three metrics used in the renewal rubric:
  - Absolute Student Achievement
  - Effective Programming for All Student Racial and Ethnic Groups
  - Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities

MCAP Update (February 2023): The 2021-22 school year was the first administration of MCAP, the state’s new assessments for ELA and Math. The majority of schools in Baltimore City performed similarly on these assessments with the average students performing at a level 2 for ELA assessments in grades 3-5, 6-8 and English 10, indicating that students demonstrate partial proficiency in this subject and need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level.

For math, City Schools, like Maryland and school districts across the country, experienced decreases between 2019 and 2022, and the average performance level for Baltimore City students is a level 2 for Math assessments for grades 3-5, and level 1 for Math assessments in grades 6-8. Performance level 1 indicates students do not yet demonstrate proficiency in the subject and need substantial academic supports to be prepared for the next grade level. For Algebra I, results were an equal mix of level 1 and 2.

Additionally, for both ELA and math assessments, many schools’ performance was so similar that the level of differentiation that allowed for ranking each school using percentile comparisons within an economic disadvantage group to determine ratings, as City Schools historically has done in operator renewal, was not possible. In some cases, if using percentile rankings, the difference between schools rated Effective and Not Effective in an MCAP absolute measure would be a difference of only two points in mean scale score, meaning schools with similar performance would receive very different ratings.

In order to address the lack of differentiation evident in the data, for the current renewal process City Schools has adopted ratings for the MCAP absolute measure identifying schools as “Developing” when their average student performance level averages to a 2 or below, and “Effective” when the student performance level averages 3. Ratings of “Highly Effective” and “Not Effective” for MCAP Absolute will not be given in this year’s renewal process.

- Trend in Student Achievement, along with Absolute and Growth data, is one of three ways assessment data is used in the renewal rubric. Because of the transition to MCAP, trend data is not available for use in this year’s renewal process. The weight of this measure has been redistributed to other measures in the Academics section of the renewal rubric.
- The 5Essentials survey of students and instructional staff has been added to the renewal review in the Academic section of the rubric. This addition helps to reduce the weight on assessment measures considered in this section while providing valuable insights on school organization. The 5Essentials is a research-backed diagnostic survey administered to

instructional staff and students that identifies five indicators that lead to improved outcomes for all students, including improved attendance, graduation rates, freshman on track and larger test score gains.<sup>1</sup> The five indicators are:

- Effective Leaders
- Collaborative Teachers
- Involved Families
- Supportive Environments
- Ambitious Instruction

"Research shows schools strong on at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to show substantial gains in student learning than schools weak on three or more of the five essentials. A low score in even just one of the five essentials reduced the likelihood of improvement to less than 10 percent."<sup>2</sup> Use of the 5Essentials in the renewal process gives Advisory Board reviewers, district leadership, the Board of School Commissioners, schools, and the public additional insight into how schools are organizing themselves for improvement in delivering high quality instruction to students.

### ***The Terms***

According to Board Policy IHBJ, City Schools may determine that a public charter school is eligible for an eight-year contract term, five-year contract term, three-year contract term, or nonrenewal. The eight-year renewal term is an option based on the updated Board Policy IHBJ. Board Policy IHBJ allows the Board to consider an eight-year term for schools that have “two or more consecutive full renewals, including demonstrating quality programming for all student groups” and that have met the standard for a five-year renewal in the year of the latest review. A non-renewal recommendation in most cases includes a decision to close the program.

### ***The Process***

The process uses the following components:

- Renewal Rubric (Updated to reflect the above changes)
- Application for Renewal
- Data Tables prepared by City Schools
- School Effectiveness Review
- 5Essentials Survey Report

The process starts with a review by the Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board (“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 assess strengths and weaknesses of each school program and make sound recommendations to the CEO.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.uchicagoimpact.org/sites/default/files/5EOnePager\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://www.uchicagoimpact.org/sites/default/files/5EOnePager_Nov2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uchicagoimpact.org/our-offerings/5essentials>

The CEO considers the recommendations and the quantitative and qualitative review of the Advisory Board, and then through administrative review, makes her 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. For the Financial Management/Governance section, a rating of not effective in any one of the three elements that make up that section can result in a rating of not effective for the entire section depending on the severity of the concerns.

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 Board Policy IHBJ and Administrative Regulation IHBJ-RA for all operator-led 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 Board Policy IHBJ states, “[t]he Board may decide that a public charter school is not eligible for two consecutive partial renewals.”

**Timeline**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Date</b>
Renewal application due from operators	September 1, 2022
Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board reviews renewal applications and provides advice to the CEO on renewal recommendations	September to October 2022, January 2023
District presents preliminary findings of strengths and weaknesses to Board at public meeting	November 9, 2022
MSDE releases 2021-22 MCAP results	January 2023
Schools receive data on measures that consider MCAP results, including Absolute performance, and submit addendum addressing MCAP results	January-February 2023
Schools receive CEO’s renewal recommendation	February 2023
Renewal recommendations presented to Board	February 14, 2023
Work Session providing operators the opportunity to provide oral testimony to Board in a meeting open to the public	February 16, 2023
Board vote on renewal recommendations; Board deferred vote on one recommendation for further consideration	February 23, 2023
Board vote on deferred recommendation	February 28, 2023

## *Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys #375*

Operator: Five Smooth Stones Foundation, Inc.

Configuration: Elementary/Middle

Type: Charter

Enrollment: 325<sup>3</sup>

### **Recommendation**

#### *3-year renewal with conditions*

- *Hire operator personnel located in the Baltimore area and approved by City Schools who is knowledgeable in K12 education and requirements for public and charter schools in Maryland.*
- *Show improvement in delivery of special education services and ensure compliance with requirements, improving practices around student behavior and ensuring due process for students, ensure compliance with scheduling of COMAR-required courses, ensure compliance with collectively bargained agreements, ensure compliance with grant management and operator capacity in general.*
- *Provide on-site EEOC training to improve practices in creating positive workplace atmosphere for staff. Sessions for school leadership and operator staff as well as schools staff must be scheduled and take place prior to the end of the current year.*

### **Discussion**

On February 28, 2023, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to renew the contract with Five Smooth Stones Foundation, Inc. to operate Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys for a three-year term running from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2026 with the following conditions:

- The operator must hire personnel located in the Baltimore area who is knowledgeable in K12 education and requirements for public and charter schools in Maryland.
- The operator must show improvement in delivery of special education services and ensure compliance with special education requirements, show improvement in practices around student behavior, due process for students, scheduling of COMAR-required courses, collectively bargained agreements, grant management and in operator capacity in general
- The operator must provide on-site EEO training to improve practices in creating positive workplace atmosphere for staff. Sessions for school leadership and operator staff as well as schools staff must be scheduled and take place prior to the end of the current school year.
- The operator must hire an external financial expert to ensure the operator's management of funds meets legal and fiduciary requirements, including improving internal controls and use and management of grant and other funds.
- The operator must develop and submit a strong recruitment strategy and plan to City School and ensure it reaches an above 80% fill rate on instructional positions.
- The school must participate in administration of the 5Essentials survey tool and demonstrate through the results that the operator is on a trajectory for improvement.

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<sup>3</sup> Final 9/30 enrollment counts for 2022-23.

- The operator must provide evidence that data practices have improved, including evidence of professional development for staff on how to use data to inform classroom instruction, and evidence of regular, consistent collaboration between teachers to analyze data and adjust class instruction according to best practices.
- The operator must have no new findings that reveal serious challenges in improving outcomes for students in the specified areas or that jeopardize student wellbeing, achievement or safety.
- Failure to meet any conditions may be the basis of earlier termination of the contract.

The school was rated “Developing” in Academics, Climate, and Financial Management and Governance.

Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys was rated “Developing” in Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall indicating that *the school is beginning or attempting to implement the mission expressed in its charter application, but the mission is not clear to most stakeholders*<sup>4</sup>. The school’s mission is to “provide the finest liberal arts education possible to Baltimore’s next generation of young men, ensuring that they will become global citizens trained to lead and serve our community, our nation, and our world.” However, the operator has more work to do in *gathering the school’s data to assess its efficacy and effectively addressed any challenges evident in the data*. To the extent that the school is implementing strategies to address problems evident in its data, they have *not yet proven effective*.

The school was rated “Developing” in PARCC growth for math for grades 3-5 placing in the 52<sup>nd</sup> percentile and for grades 6-8 placing in the 62<sup>nd</sup> percentile. The school was rated “Not Effective” in PARCC growth for English Language Arts (ELA) for grades 3-5 placing in the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile and for grades 6-8 placing in the 46<sup>th</sup> percentile. The student growth percentile looks at the extent to which a school can improve individual student performance year to year for school years 2017-18 to 2018-19.

2021-22 was the first year that the state’s new assessment, the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) was administered. The school is rated “Developing” in both MCAP ELA for grades 3-5 and 6-8, as well as in math for grades 3-5 and 6-8. In both ELA tests, the school’s average student performance level was 2, indicating that students demonstrated partial proficiency and need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness. In math for grades 3-5 and 6-8, the school’s average performance level was 1, indicating students do not yet demonstrate proficiency and need substantial academic support to be prepared for the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness. This performance is similar to other schools in the district in these assessments.

The school was rated “Effective” in Vision and Engagement from the School Effectiveness Review (SER). This measure considers whether the school has a clear vision and mission that promotes student-centered, culturally relevant learning that prepares students for future success, whether the school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families and the community, and whether the climate and culture of the school creates a welcoming learning environment that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student. The SER site visit found that school practices in this area are implemented at a level that is improving the school’s effectiveness.

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<sup>4</sup> Text in italics is quoted from the 2022-23 operator renewal rubric.

The school was rated “Developing” in Student Attendance: Chronic Absence, where attendance and chronic absence rates were better than district averages however, the rate of chronic absence increased at a significantly higher rate than the increase seen on average in 2020-21 at other schools in the district. This measure considers the extent to which the school has implemented effective strategies that have kept student attendance high and chronic absence low or led to significant improvements over the course of the contract. While the school has historically been successful in addressing chronic absence of students, the operator provided limited evidence of the school’s strategies and practices and did not offer explanation or solutions for the increase in chronic absence seen in the most recent year of the contract.

Baltimore Collegiate was rated “Not Effective” in Programming for Students with Disabilities. *The school has failed to sufficiently implement processes, interventions and strategies to support student outcomes.* In 2021-22, the school had significant number of parent response complaints, which triggered an audit of services to students with disabilities. This audit revealed shortcomings in the school’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development process, including outdated performance monitoring data, inaccurate teacher schedules, and copied IEPs, requiring Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) meetings for all students whose records were examined. Despite enhanced support and professional development from district staff, the school’s audit conducted later in the year as part of the regular renewal process turned up many of the same deficiencies and, again, led to FAPE meetings for all students whose records were audited. The operator must improve in this area so *that school can work towards a trajectory of growth with full awareness of its data and responsibilities to students with disabilities.*

Five Smooth Stones Foundation, the operator of Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys, has had serious, ongoing operational difficulties over the course of the contract, leading to a “Not Effective” rating in Operator Capacity, meaning that *throughout the charter or contract term the school has operated ineffectively as evidenced by the fact that the operator does not meet state or federal reporting requirements, or critical District or federal obligations or has ineffectively managed grants.* In October 2021, the operator was issued a Notice of Probation for ongoing operational issues that had not been remedied despite a series of escalating accountability notices, communication and support from the district. A Notice of Probation is a serious sanction against a school and indicates that the operator has major ongoing operational deficiencies that could lead to the revocation of its charter and termination of its contract to run the school. The Notice of Probation noted four areas in which the operator’s actions put the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and the district at risk. The first was regarding background checks for employees of the operating organization, Five Smooth Stones Foundation, where the operator repeatedly failed to accurately and completely report the identities of its employees, or fully conduct criminal background checks for all employees who worked in the school, in violation of state law and district requirements. The second was for violations of the charter law and contract where the operator’s employees were, in some instances, taking over roles reserved for employees of the district, which is a violation of the state’s charter law. The third area covered by the Notice of Probation was Five Smooth Stone’s performance with grant funds, where, due to a failure to establish proper procedures for management of grant funds, which is a core responsibility of charter operators, over \$450,000 in funding meant for Baltimore Collegiate’s students was forfeited in school years 2020-21 and 2021-22. Finally, the Notice of Probation addressed the school’s failure to deliver science instruction to students during an entire semester, which is a violation of state and district requirements.



After receiving the Notice of Probation, the board of Five Smooth Stones Foundation took the serious step of replacing the organization’s founder and executive director, reorganizing the operating structure and reforming its procedures and posture around concerns. For the remainder of the 2021-22 school year, the operator’s performance improved, with support from the district, which provided ongoing technical assistance, guidance and regular meetings with the operator to check on progress towards operational goals. However, in 2022-23 difficulties in operations reappeared and Five Smooth Stones Foundation was issued a continuance of the prior year’s Notice of Probation, noting areas which had not been fully cured from the previous notice, as well as additional areas of difficulty.

With respect to these serious concerns in operator capacity, Five Smooth Stones Foundation has taken extraordinary steps to address its difficulties in this area. In addition to the removal of the founder/executive director noted above, the operator took difficult steps to improve school operations, including conducting a principal search, finding and putting a school principal in place with many years’ experience in City Schools. The recommendation to continue the school’s contract for three additional years acknowledges Five Smooth Stones’ commitment to improvement in its operation of the school and gives the operator time to show growth in this area with cognizance of the new team leading the school.

**Findings (Elementary/Middle school rubric)**

*Category 1. Is the school an academic success?*

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
<b>1.1 Absolute Student Achievement</b>	Average Student Performance Level MCAP Math (grades 3-5)	<b>Developing</b>
	Average Student Performance Level MCAP ELA (grades 3-5)	<b>Developing</b>
	Average Student Performance Level MCAP Math (grades 6-8)	<b>Developing</b>
	Average Student Performance Level MCAP ELA (grades 6-8)	<b>Developing</b>
<b>1.2 Student Achievement Growth</b>	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	<b>Developing</b>
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	<b>Not Effective</b>
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	<b>Developing</b>
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	<b>Not Effective</b>

<p><b>1.3 Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>1.4 5Essentials Student and Teacher Survey</b></p>	<p>The extent to which the school is organized for improvement</p>	<p><b>Not Effective</b></p>
<p><b>Academics Overall</b></p>		<p><b>Developing</b></p>

Category 2. Does the school have a strong school climate?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
<p><b>2.1 SER, Highly Effective Instruction</b></p>	<p>School Effectiveness Review Score - Highly Effective Instruction</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>2.2 SER, Talented People</b></p>	<p>School Effectiveness Review Score - Talented People</p>	<p><b>Not Effective</b></p>
<p><b>2.3 SER, Vision and Engagement</b></p>	<p>School Effectiveness Review Score - Vision and Engagement</p>	<p><b>Effective</b></p>
<p><b>2.4 Family Survey</b></p>	<p>Family: School Survey Family Satisfaction Rating</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>2.5 Cohort Retention<sup>5</sup></b></p>	<p>Cohort Retention Rating</p>	<p><b>N/A</b></p>
<p><b>2.6 Student Attendance, Chronic Absence</b></p>	<p>The extent to which the school has implemented effective strategies that have kept student attendance high and chronic absences low or led to significant decreases in chronic absence over the course of the contract.</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>2.7 Suspensions</b></p>	<p>The extent to which the school has implemented effective strategies that have kept suspensions low or led to significant decreases over the course of the contract.</p>	<p><b>Not Effective</b></p>

<sup>5</sup> Due to the school’s unique entry grade, it does not receive a separate rating for Cohort Retention. Instead, the school’s cohort retention data is considered in the Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall metric.

<p><b>2.8 Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Not Effective</b></p>
<p><b>Climate Overall</b></p>		<p><b>Developing</b></p>

*Category 3. Has the school followed sufficient financial management and governance practices?*

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
<p><b>3.1 Audit Content, Internal Controls</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>3.2 Operator Capacity</b></p>	<p>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.)</p>	<p><b>Not Effective</b></p>
<p><b>3.3 SER, Strategic Leadership/Governance</b></p>	<p>School Effectiveness Review Score - Strategic Leadership</p>	<p><b>Developing</b></p>
<p><b>Financial Management/Governance Overall</b></p>		<p><b>Developing</b></p>