



## **Renewal Report Roots and Branches School (379)**

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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 Effectiveness Review (SER) performed on site at each school and the school's renewal application, along with an evaluation of the school's performance based on the renewal rubric 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 IHB and associated administrative regulations (IHB-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), highly effective instruction (from the SER), 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, and relevant documentation provided by the school's board)
- **Effective management** (school compliance with laws, rules, policies, and regulations)

The renewal process is a component of City Schools' annual review of its school portfolio, designed to ensure that students and families across the district have access to school options that meet their interests and needs. In 2011, City Schools formed 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) 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.

At the conclusion of each year's renewal cycle, staff engages 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 implications for the renewal process of including results from statewide PARCC assessments for the first time, given that, to date, a significant portion of the weight in the student achievement portion of the renewal decision has been based on assessment data. Changes made to the framework as a result of this most recent review include the following:

- The Highly Effective Instruction measure from the SER, which had temporarily been moved to the Academics section of the renewal rubric while the district transitioned to PARCC, returned to the School Climate section.

- Credit for success in the College and Career Readiness measure based on enrollment in credit-bearing college coursework is awarded for students who earn a C or higher in the course. In previous years, any passing grade would qualify as success.
- For Chronic Absence and Suspension sections, the definition of “Highly Effective” was changed to include schools that had achieved significant reduction in Chronic Absence and Suspensions rates. In previous years, a school could only earn a “Highly Effective” rating if its rates in these areas were low over the entire course of its contract term.

## ***The Process***

The review process has the following components:

- Renewal rubric (includes data from standardized assessments and school surveys)
- Application for renewal
- Data tables prepared by City Schools
- School Effectiveness Review

The Charter and Operator-led Advisory Board, a cross-representational group made up of members representing foundations, nonprofit organizations, school choice advocates, school operators, and district representatives, reviews each of these components. In performing its review, the Advisory Board must look at all data and information, both quantitative and qualitative, to understand the complex operations of schools. In some instances, the nature or severity of an issue raised during the renewal process is serious enough for the Advisory Board to give it extra weight in formulating its recommendation, especially in instances when the issue affects the wellbeing of students, staff or the district as a whole. 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 recommendation, and then makes her own recommendation to the Board for vote. According to Board policy, City Schools may determine that a public charter school is eligible for a five-year contract term, three-year contract term, or nonrenewal.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Schools submit renewal applications	September 6, 2018
Charter and Operator-led Advisory Board reviews renewal applications and makes recommendations to the CEO	September to October 2018
District presents recommendations to Board at public meeting	November 13, 2018
Opportunity for operator to provide oral testimony to Board in a meeting open to the public	November 20, 2018
Board votes on renewal recommendations	January 8, 2019

## **Roots and Branches School (#379)**

*Operator:* Roots and Branches School, Inc.

*Configuration:* Elementary

*Type:* Charter

*Enrollment:* 139<sup>1</sup>

### **Recommendation**

*Non-renewal*

### **Renewal summary**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Finding</b>
Is the school an academic success? (min. 50% weight)	Developing
Does the school have a strong school climate?	Effective
Has the school followed sufficient governance management and governance practices?	Not Effective
Has the school followed sufficient financial management practices? <sup>2</sup>	Does not meet expectations

### **Discussion**

On January 8, 2019, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners approved the recommendation that the contract with Roots and Branches School, Inc., to operate Roots and Branches School not be renewed and that the school close in Summer 2019.

The school was rated developing in Academics, effective in Climate and not effective/does not meet expectations in Governance/Financial Management.

The school was rated does not meet expectations in Financial Management based on a review of the school's audits. Auditors noted going concerns in two of the school's last three audits. The inclusion of a going concern note indicates that the auditors found conditions or events that raise substantial doubt the operator would be able to continue operations for a reasonable period of time. These results raise questions about the school's continued financial viability.

The school was rated not effective in PARCC absolute performance in English Language Arts (ELA) 3-5 (19<sup>th</sup> percentile in its economic disadvantage [ED] group, which compares schools with similar levels of wealth and by grade band, with a mean scale score of 694) and math 3-5 (9<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Financial management considers a review of the operator's audits over the contract term. "Meets expectations" is the highest rating available, followed by "Developing" and "Does not meet expectations".

percentile of its ED group, with a mean scale score of 692). For the absolute performance measure of the renewal rubric, schools are compared to other schools with similar levels of economic disadvantage because absolute performance on standardized testing is strongly correlated with economic disadvantage. In the case of Roots and Branches School, despite having one of the lowest economic disadvantage rates in its comparison group, the school scored in the 19<sup>th</sup> percentile in ELA 3-5 and 9<sup>th</sup> percentile in Math 3-5, with most of the schools scoring higher also having higher levels of economic disadvantage. The school was also rated not effective in PARCC achievement trend in ELA 3-5 (20<sup>th</sup> percentile overall) and in math 3-5 (36<sup>th</sup> percentile). The school was rated not effective in cohort retention, which considers the extent to which students who enter the school at its entry point remain two years later averaged over time; the school has a retention rate of 45.6% placing it in the 11<sup>th</sup> percentile. Finally, the school was rated developing in effective programming for students with disabilities, a measure that evaluates whether the school is exhibiting a trajectory for growth for students with disabilities, is aware of its data for this subgroup, and has effectively and consistently implemented processes, interventions, and strategies to support student outcomes in this area.

**Findings (elementary school rubric)**

***Category 1, Academics: Is the school an academic success?***

<b>Sub-Category</b>	<b>Renewal Metric</b>	<b>City Schools Rating</b>
<b>1.1 Absolute Student Achievement</b>	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	<b>Not Effective</b>
	Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	<b>Not Effective</b>
<b>1.2 Student Achievement Trend</b>	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	<b>Not Effective</b>
	Trend in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	<b>Not Effective</b>
<b>1.3 Student Achievement Growth</b>	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 3-5)	<b>Effective</b>
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 3-5)	<b>Developing</b>
<b>1.4 Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall</b>	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.	<b>Developing</b>
<b>Academics Overall Rating</b>		<b>Developing</b>

**Category 2, Climate: Does the school have a strong climate?**

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
<b>2.1 SER, Highly Effective Instruction</b>	School Effectiveness Review Score - Highly Effective Instruction	<b>Effective</b>
<b>2.2 SER, Talented People</b>	School Effectiveness Review Score - Talented People	<b>Highly Effective</b>
<b>2.3 SER, Vision and Engagement</b>	School Effectiveness Review Score - Vision and Engagement	<b>Effective</b>
<b>2.4 Parent, Staff and Student Satisfaction</b>	Staff: School Survey Staff Rating	<b>Developing</b>
	Students: School Survey Student Rating	<b>Developing</b>
	Parents: School Survey Parent Rating	<b>Effective</b>
<b>2.5 Cohort Retention</b>	Cohort Retention Rating	<b>Not Effective</b>
<b>2.6 Student Attendance, Chronic Absence</b>	The extent to which the school aware of its chronic absence data, has strong processes in place to identify root causes and provide supports to families, and has implemented effective strategies that have kept chronic absence low over the course of the contract or have made significant reductions in chronic absence rates over time.	<b>Developing</b>
<b>2.7 Suspensions</b>	The extent to which the school aware of its suspension data, has positive behavior interventions in place, and has implemented effective strategies that have kept suspensions low over the course of the contract or has resulted in significant decreases over time.	<b>Effective</b>
<b>2.8 Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities</b>	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.	<b>Developing</b>
<b>Climate Overall Rating</b>		<b>Effective</b>

**Category 3, Finance and Governance: Has the school followed sufficient financial management and governance practices?**

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
<b>3.1 Audit Content, Internal Controls</b>	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.	<b>Does Not Meet Expectations</b>
<b>Financial Management Overall Rating</b>		
<b>3.2 Operator Capacity</b>	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 include compliance with critical District, state or federal reporting requirements, timely audit and budget submissions, monitoring reports, quarterly reports; whether school has been able to meet financial obligations or needed loans/advances from the district to meet obligations, and the relative number, frequency and severity of Notices of Concern or Notices of Reprimand.)	<b>Effective</b>
<b>3.3 SER, Strategic Leadership/Governance</b>	School Effectiveness Review Score - Strategic Leadership	<b>Effective</b>
<b>Governance Overall Rating</b>		<b>Not Effective</b>