

New Jersey Department of Education Office of Charter Schools Guidelines and Criteria for the 2012 Renewal Application

Purpose

The purpose of the Guidelines and Criteria for the Renewal Application is to provide clarity and direction for the Renewal Application. More specifically, this document is designed to:

- Offer guidance when answering the renewal application questions,
- Communicate the Office of Charter School's approach to evaluating the renewal application, and
- Emphasize the Office of Charter School's priorities regarding high quality charter schools.

Overview

Central to the charter school concept is the trade-off between greater autonomy and increased accountability. Charter schools operate under fewer regulations than traditional public schools and are consequently held to higher accountability standards. Charter school leaders understand the greater emphasis placed on results-based accountability and the importance of producing positive outcomes. If a school is not producing marked results, it runs the risk of its charter being revoked.

In July 2012, the Office of Charter Schools released the Performance Framework which outlines clear academic, organizational and fiscal standards by which all New Jersey public charter schools will be evaluated. The Performance Framework was developed to ensure that each and every New Jersey charter school is serving students with a high-quality public education. The Performance Framework focuses on outcome measures that align with the Department's major goal of providing a high quality education for all students regardless of zip code. The evaluation of a school using the Performance Framework will be the primary tool in making the high-stakes decision to renew or not renew a charter school in New Jersey.

The renewal application has been revamped to align with the measures and targets within the Performance Framework. The decision to renew a charter for each subsequent five-year period will be based on a comprehensive review guided by the following three questions:

1. Is the academic program a success?
2. Is the school financially viable?
3. Is the school equitable and organizationally sound?

The Commissioner of Education will notify a charter school regarding the granting or denial of the renewal on or before February 28 of the last school year of the current charter term. The notification to a charter school that is not granted a renewal shall include reasons for the denial.

Evaluation

The charter renewal process gives charter school operators an opportunity to present clear and compelling evidence regarding how well they have progressed towards achieving their goals over the course of their charter. The renewal application allows each school the opportunity to provide evidence that the school is fiscally and organizationally sound and its academic program is successful. It also gives a school the occasion to examine its progress towards meeting its mission, goals and objectives, assess its strengths and needs, and plan its course for the future. Renewal should be seen as an occasion to highlight successes and growth, build upon and correct mistakes and set the course for the next charter term.

The Office of Charter Schools is looking for responses that demonstrate that the school has made marked progress towards:

- achieving its mission,
- successfully implementing its educational program,
- meeting its academic and non-academic goals,
- increased student achievement,
- demonstrating fiscal and operational soundness, and
- planning for the next charter term.

There are numerous pieces of evidence that will be evaluated before a renewal decision is rendered. The information that the Office of Charter Schools will be reviewing includes:

Accountability Documents

- Initial Charter School Application
- Performance Framework
- Annual Reports
- Charter Amendments
- Renewal Application including Comments from County and District(s)
- Site Visit Documentation
- School Monitoring Documentation

Student Performance Data

- NJASK Scores
- HSPA Scores
- Student Growth Scores
- Comparisons to District-of-Residence Student Performance
- Graduation Rates and Postsecondary/College Readiness Data (if applicable)
- Attainment of Mission-Specific Goals

Governance and Compliance

- Evaluation of Board of Trustees and School Administration
- Admissions and Enrollment
- Curriculum Alignment

- Implementation of ELL and Special Education Requirements and Programs
- Annual Financial Audits
- Evaluation of Effective Systems for Financial Oversight
- GAAP Accounting System Review
- Facility Plans
- Federal and State Reporting Requirements

Renewal Application Criteria

Responses and supporting evidence should be:

- **Coherent:** responds to what the school is trying to demonstrate
- **Comprehensive:** provides a complete picture of what the school is trying to demonstrate. Reviewers are **not** looking for extensive narratives; comprehensive means that the response does not present a partial view.
- **Accurate:** concise and appropriate as it relates to the question.
- **Relevant:** pertinent to the response.
- **Quantitative or measurable when possible:** use **outcome measures** that reflect the progress and effectiveness of what is being demonstrated.

CATEGORY	QUESTION SPECIFICS	A QUALITY AND THOROUGH RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING WHEN ANSWERING EACH QUESTION:
1. Overview		
1.1. Basic Information	a) Provide the School’s Basic Information: Name of School, Year School Opened, Grade Levels, Current Enrollment, Maximum Enrollment, Current Waiting List, School Address(es) District(s) / Region of Residence, Website Address, Name of School Leader, School Leader Email and Phone Number, Name of Board President, Board President Email and Phone Number, Name of SBA, SBA Email and Phone Number. b) Provide the School’s Demographic Information: # and % FRPL, # and % Special Ed, # and % LEP, # and % White, # and % African American, # and % Hispanic, # and % Asian, # and % Other Ethnic Groups	✓ All requested Information is complete and accurate.
1.2 Educational Program	a) Describe the school’s educational philosophy and any unique and innovative features in the educational program.	✓ The school is implementing the essential terms of the education program as defined in its charter. ✓ The unique and innovative components of the educational program are clearly articulated.

CATEGORY	QUESTION SPECIFICS	A QUALITY AND THOROUGH RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING WHEN ANSWERING EACH QUESTION:
2. Is the Academic Program a Success?		
2.1. State Assessment Results	<p>a) For schools serving grades 3 through 8, fill in the requested charts with the school’s overall state assessment results.</p> <p>b) For schools serving grade 11, fill in the requested charts with the school’s overall state assessment results.</p> <p>c) Discuss the school’s academic achievement results over the last four years. How has the school performed with regards to absolute, comparative and growth measures over the last charter term? In the absence of expected achievement, identify proposed changes to the educational program that the school will implement to improve the school’s academic performance and student outcomes.</p> <p>Note: In order to guide your answer, you may use portions of the academic section of the newly released Performance Framework: http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/PerformanceFramework.pdf</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A clear presentation of all the information requested regarding statewide assessment data including school-wide results and subgroup data. Note: Prior to the school’s renewal site visit, the DOE will provide the school’s official data over the previous charter term to discuss at the site visit. At that time, please review the information and alert us if there are data discrepancies. ✓ The school shows academic achievement and progress and is capable of presenting, analyzing, and evaluating the results. ✓ The school uses the measures, metrics and targets within the Performance Framework to accurately reflect its academic performance. ✓ In the absence of expected achievement, the response identifies and explains the areas for improvement, presenting the proposed changes in curriculum, instruction or in any other key component of its educational program and mission in order to address these issues.
2.2 College/ Postsecondary Readiness (For High Schools Only)	<p>2.2 Is the school preparing students for college and career?</p> <p>a) Describe how the school evaluates and tracks whether students are ready for college and career. Examples may include ACT/SAT results, graduation rates and enrollment in post-secondary institutions.</p> <p>Note: In order to guide your answer, you may use the postsecondary readiness portion of the academic section of the newly released Performance Framework: http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/PerformanceFramework.pdf</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The school defines relevant measures, metrics and targets and can provide clear evidence that anticipated outcomes are being met. ✓ Expected outcomes are both ambitious and attainable. ✓ The school uses or has a plan to use the measures within the Performance Framework to track student performance.

<p>2.3 Mission-Specific Goals</p>	<p>2.3 Is the school meeting its mission?</p> <p>a) State the mission of the school as it appears in your charter application.</p> <p>b) How does your school measure and track mission accomplishment? In the prescribed chart format, provide at least 2 to 3 goals that have been used to measure and track mission accomplishment over multiple years in the last charter term.</p> <p><i>NOTE: These goals do not have to come from your original charter application. You may use state assessment data as evidence of success. Items filled in are for demonstration purposes only.</i></p> <p>c) Provide an explanation as to whether or not your school has met its mission-specific goals and a plan/timeline as to how the school will progress towards (or maintain) goal attainment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mission-specific goals are SMART: specific, measurable, ambitious and attainable, relevant and time-bound. ✓ The school’s measurements are valid and reliable and demonstrate rigor. ✓ Goals are outcome-driven and have been tracked over multiple years. ✓ The school provides an explanation of whether or not the school has met these goals and how the school is progressing towards the goal attainment. ✓ The school has a realistic plan and timeline to improve student outcomes and meet its mission.
---	--	--

CATEGORY	QUESTION SPECIFICS	A QUALITY AND THOROUGH RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING WHEN ANSWERING EACH QUESTION:
3. Organizational Framework		
3.1 Data Use	<p>3.1 Does the school use data to inform, guide and improve instruction and other school practices?</p> <p>a) Provide evidence and specific examples of how your school uses data to inform, guide and improve instruction and other school practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The school provides examples of what data is collected at specific intervals, how it is used, which stakeholders are involved and how it impacts curriculum and instruction.
3.2 Admissions & Enrollment	<p>3.2 Are the school’s admissions and enrollment practices fair and equitable?</p> <p>a) Describe your school’s admissions and enrollment practices and the actions your school has taken to ensure compliance with N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-7 and 18A:36A-8.</p> <p><i>Note: This question has already been answered in this year’s annual report. If you want to expand on the answer from the annual report or if your answer has changed, please respond. If you do not wish to add to the annual report response, please write “See annual report” as a response.</i></p> <p>b) Explain the school’s recruiting and advertising policies and how the school ensures that it is advertising in the widest and most inclusive manner possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ School policies and procedures ensure that the school is open to all students on a space available basis and the school does not discriminate in its admissions practices or policies. ✓ The school provides evidence that it is committed to serving all students, especially the highest need students requiring special education services, students who are English Language Learners, students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and other underserved or at-risk populations ✓ Recruiting and advertising policies include providing multiple ways for parents and students to access and complete an admissions application and applications are available in multiple languages.
3.3 Students with Disabilities & English Language Learners	<p>3.3 Is the school protecting the rights of students with disabilities and English language learners?</p> <p>a) Describe the process by which students with special needs are identified and evidence that the school is effective in providing the right resources and services for students with disabilities.</p> <p>b) Describe the process by which students with English language learners are identified and evidence that the school is effective in providing the right resources and services for these students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The school provides clear and effective strategies for identifying special education and ELL students. ✓ Methods and strategies are in place to monitor the progress, growth and success of all students. ✓ School records indicate that the school is compliant with requirements of the IEP.
3.4 Attrition & Enrollment Stability	<p>3.4 Is the school monitoring and minimizing attrition rates and maintaining enrollment stability?</p> <p>a) Fill in the chart with the appropriate enrollment information over the last 4 years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Information requested in the chart is accurate and complete. ✓ Policies and procedures are in place to minimize attrition rates.

	<p>b) Provide information regarding the school’s attrition rate over the last 4 years. Using data starting with the number of students enrolled in September, what number and percentage of students transferred out of the school by the end of the school year? How does the school both monitor and minimize attrition rates? (<i>Attrition rate is calculated by the number of students leaving the school during the school year over number of students enrolled in the school at the beginning of the school year.</i>)</p>	<p>✓ The school documents the reasons for student transfers and provides strategies to address students leaving the school.</p>
<p>3.5 Mission Alignment & High Expectations</p>	<p>3.5 Does the school’s learning environment align with its mission and program and does the school foster a culture of high expectations?</p> <p>a) Explain how high expectations are communicated to both students and teachers and how the school’s policies foster a positive school culture that allows for the fulfillment of the schools mission/educational goals. Evidence may include levels of disciplinary referrals, class attendance, and participation in school events and activities.</p>	<p>✓ The school provides the key components of the school’s instructional practices and a discussion of how the components are all aligned.</p> <p>✓ The school gives clear evidence that its mission, message and methods are used to convey a culture of high expectations to all stakeholders, including students and teachers.</p> <p>✓ The school provides specific examples of how school culture is measured.</p>
<p>3.6 Governance Requirements</p>	<p>3.6 Is the school complying with governance requirements?</p> <p>a) Provide a current organizational chart which includes the board of trustees and all employees.</p> <p>b) Provide information regarding how the Board of Trustees effectively evaluates the school administration. What policies and procedures are in place to evaluate the school leader on an annual basis?</p>	<p>✓ The organizational chart is complete and accurate and aligns with the school’s by-laws.</p> <p>✓ The school has effective policies and procedures in place to evaluate school administration.</p>

CATEGORY	QUESTION SPECIFICS	A QUALITY AND THOROUGH RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING WHEN ANSWERING EACH QUESTION:
4. Fiscal Viability		
4.1. Fiscal Solvency	<p>4.1 Is the school fiscally solvent?</p> <p>a) Present the following information regarding your school’s fiscal viability over the last five years. Please use audited financial information for the years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 (if available). <i>Financial ratios for the year ended 2011-2012 may not be available, as audits are not due until December 5, 2012.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Current Ratio (working Capital Ratio): Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities ○ Unrestricted Days Cash: Unrestricted Cash divided by (Total Expenses /365) ○ Enrollment Variance: Actual Enrollment divided by Enrollment Projection in Board-Approved Budget ○ Is the school in default of loan covenant(s) and/or delinquent with debt service payments? (Y/N) Please explain. ○ Total Margin: Net Income divided by Total Revenue ○ Debt to Asset Ratio: Total Liabilities divided by Total Assets ○ Cash Flow: Provide evidence that your school’s cash flow is positive each of the last 3 years of operation. ○ Debt Service Coverage Ratio: (Net Income + Depreciation + Interest Expense) / (Principal and Interest Payments) <p>Note: For your reference, please see the financial section of the newly released Performance Framework: http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/PerformanceFramework.pdf</p> <p>b) Provide a summary of findings from independent audits and, where applicable, how the school developed and implemented a corrective action plan in response to audit findings. (If necessary, evidence may be attached as clearly labeled documents in the Appendix.)</p> <p>c) As an appendix, provide a budget summary, narrative, and cash flow for fiscal year 2013- 2014, in the prescribed format attached to this application in excel format. Do not include any reliance on outside fundraising unless the school can document that funding has been secured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All requested fiscal ratios are complete, accurate and meet the standards within the fiscal performance framework over the last five years. ✓ Evidence of a commitment to maintaining the financial viability of the school, as confirmed by a consistent unqualified independent audit opinion with no findings, or successfully implemented corrective action plans. If applicable, provide debt repayment plans and schedules. ✓ The budget summary, narrative, and cash flow for fiscal year 2013- 2014 is complete and accurate. ✓ Budget(s) that reflect current and/or expansion plans, if any.

CATEGORY	QUESTION SPECIFICS	A QUALITY AND THOROUGH RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING WHEN ANSWERING EACH QUESTION:
5. Five-Year Planning		
5.1. Projected Enrollment	<p>a) Provide a five-year enrollment chart by grade level, in the prescribed format below. Ensure that the chart allows for the natural progression of students from year-to-year.</p> <p>NOTE: <i>If planning to expand enrollment, please provide <u>two</u> enrollment charts. One chart should indicate the enrollment expansion and another charter should not include an expansion. Please note that any expansion of enrollment will have to be approved by the Commissioner in the renewal process.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All requested Information is complete and accurate. ✓ Two enrollment charts are provided for schools planning expansion.
5.2. Plans for the Next Five Years	<p>5.2 What are the school's plans for the next five years of the charter?</p> <p>a) Describe what changes and improvements the school will undertake in the next five years based on the school's examination of results and student performance outcomes.</p> <p>Note: <i>In order to guide your answer, please review the measures and targets in the Performance Framework.</i></p> <p>b) In the prescribed format, provide any additional mission-specific goals that you will be tracking over the next five years. NOTE: Mission-specific goals should be focused on outcomes rather than process measures. Provide information and evidence that is both valid and verifiable.</p> <p>c) Provide detailed information on the school's plan for a facility for the five years of the next charter. The plan should include an adequate and detailed financial arrangement and timeline for the facility.</p> <p>d) Describe any significant changes the school expects to make in the following areas over the next charter term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendments to your school's charter/charter agreement • Governance and/or Education Service Provider (ESP) structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ An explanation of the key changes and improvements planned for the next charter term, as projected and related to an internal examination of school-wide data. ✓ If applicable, additional SMART mission-specific goals that focus on outcome measures. ✓ Evidence of well-articulated facility needs and plans. ✓ Plans that include facility costs including, as applicable, cost of purchasing, leasing, building, or renovating an educational facility that are realistic and reasonable. ✓ Fiscal viability plans for either financing or renovating with an appropriate timeline. ✓ Description and explanation of significant changes to the school with regards to amendments to the charter/charter agreement or governance structure and how these changes will further the school's mission/program and improve student outcomes.