

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO BE PROPOSED:**

March 2, 2022

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Side By Side Charter School from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2027, subject to the Commissioner's March 2, 2022, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of \_\_\_\_\_, this second day of March, Two Thousand Twenty-Two.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** March 2, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Renewal of State Charter - Side By Side Charter School, Norwalk

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

In accordance with subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), charters may be renewed, upon application, in accordance with the provisions for the granting of new charters. The State Board of Education (SBE) may renew a charter for a period of up to five years. The SBE makes renewal decisions based on evidence of the following performance standards:

1. *School Performance:* Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?
2. *Stewardship, Governance and Management:* Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?
3. *Student Population:* Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?
4. *Legal Compliance:* Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the SBE carefully evaluate qualitative and quantitative evidence, and longitudinal data aligned to the four performance standards outlined above when making charter renewal decisions. The charter performance framework drives the CSDE's charter school accountability systems and processes, including initial approval decisions, annual monitoring, and renewal determinations. From inception to renewal, charter schools must abide by the CSDE's charter school accountability procedures and performance framework. Charter monitoring takes place through annual reporting, meetings, correspondence, data submissions and site visits, as appropriate. In accordance with C.G.S. § 10-66bb(g), a charter may be renewed upon application if the charter school has demonstrated satisfactory performance relative to the four performance standards.

## **History/Background**

Side By Side Charter School (SBS) opened in the fall of 1997. The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2020-21 reported 235 students in Grades PK-8 with 88.1 percent residing in Norwalk (the host district), and the remaining 11.9 percent of students coming from four area towns. Table 1, on page 13, of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides 2020-21 student enrollment and demographic data. Fifty-seven point nine percent of SBS's students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals and 8.5 percent of the students receive special education services. The mission of SBS "is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed, and every voice is to be heard. We engage our students in a challenging and relevant curriculum of the highest standard that will reflect and enhance their diversity and promote their unique gifts and talents. We build character and responsibility through a commitment to community, social justice, and tolerance towards others."

## **Charter Renewal Process**

Application for Renewal of Charter: The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of SBS's charter on November 1, 2021. The application detailed the charter school's progress, operations, and achievement in relation to the CSDE's charter school performance standards: (a) school performance; (b) stewardship, governance, and management; (c) student population; and (d) legal compliance. SBS submitted data and evidence to substantiate the charter school's written responses.

A renewal team comprised of the CSDE staff with expertise in curriculum, assessments, special education, English learners, school management, finance, and school governance reviewed the renewal application and requested clarification and additional information, where necessary.

Renewal Site Visit: On December 1, 2021, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at SBS. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe the school's programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school's charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through the onsite visit observations, document reviews, interviews, and focus groups. The team spoke with board members, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. The team used this process to ensure that the school is functioning in compliance with the law and the school's mission. The team verified the responses detailed in the renewal application regarding compliance with the law and the CSDE's performance framework and accountability plan.

Invitation for Written Comment: The CSDE solicited written comments on the renewal of SBS Charter School from the Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools and from contiguous school districts: Darien, New Canaan, Westport, and Wilton. The CSDE received a letter supporting the renewal of SBS's charter from Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent, Norwalk Public Schools (see Attachment A). The CSDE also received a letter supporting the renewal of SBS's charter from The Honorable Harry W. Rilling, Mayor, City of Norwalk (See attachment B). In addition, the CSDE received a letter supporting the renewal of the charter school from State Senate Majority Leader, Bob Duff (see Attachment C).

*Public Hearing:* Erik Clemons, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on November 9, 2021, in the city of Norwalk, and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of SBS and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the SBS community, including family members, students, school staff, and community members. Over 45 people attended the public hearing. Nineteen individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of the charter. No one spoke out against the renewal of the school's charter.

### **Review of State Student Data, and Site Visit Findings**

The most recent available data and information contained in the Charter Renewal Report and state student data (beginning on page 7) indicates SBS's performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights school strengths and areas for continued growth.

### **Special Considerations and Analyses Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

When viewing and interpreting the results for summative assessments administered in 2020-21 in comparison to 2018–19 and earlier exam administrations, it is important to note the similarities and differences. While the 2020-21 assessments used the same test blueprint, item bank, test forms, and in-person testing protocols as in 2018–19, there were many marked differences:

- schools were fully remote from mid-March to mid-June 2020;
- in March 2020, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from both administering state academic assessments in 2019-20 and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System;
- in 2020-21, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control;
- in 2020-21, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct;
- in-person school changed including the emergence of new instructional approaches such as concurrent teaching;
- students and educators expressed increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and trauma;
- in 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible; and there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years.

Considering these differences, and to best support the use of 2020-21 assessment results to inform the charter renewal process in 2022, the CSDE conducted specialized analyses for Smarter Balanced Assessments.

- The CSDE used “matched cohort growth” (i.e., growth of same students from one grade to another) when feasible to evaluate how growth during the pandemic was different from growth before the pandemic.
- All results are disaggregated by a student's learning model: in-person (more than 75 percent of days in-person); hybrid (between 25 percent and 75 percent of days in-person); or remote (less than 25 percent of days in-person). At SBS, about 98 percent of students in Grades 3-8 learned in a hybrid format during 2020-21; very few students learned remotely.
- In most cases, only those scores from students who tested in-person were included.

### **Strengths Include**

- Among SBS hybrid students in Grades 5-8 who had a prior ELA score in 2018-19 (N=76), their ELA proficiency rate increased slightly from 42.1 percent in 2018-19 to 43.4 percent in 2020-21. By contrast, prior to the pandemic, a similar matched student analysis from 2016-17 and 2018-19 (N=85) revealed that the ELA proficiency rate increased from 50.0 percent in 2016-17 to 61.2 percent in 2018-19.
- Among SBS hybrid students in Grades 5-8 who had a prior Math score in 2018-19 (N=76), their Math proficiency rate increased from 35.5 percent in 2018-19 to 43.4 percent in 2020-21. Prior to the pandemic, a similar matched student analysis from 2016-17 and 2018-19 (N=85) revealed that the Math proficiency rate increased from 52.4 percent in 2016-17 to 62.4 percent in 2018-19.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in SBS's last three certified financial audits.
- Overall, the student body reflects the demographics of the surrounding community.
- The school demonstrates strong community support as evidenced by testimony provided by individuals at the public hearing and interviews with parents and students during the site visit.
- School website and Governing Board documents demonstrate that the Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public.
- The school's suspension rates over the three most recent years reported, 2018-19 through 2020-21, have remained below the host district and state.
- SBS's 2018-19 and 2019-20 Discipline Tier Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data has remained at Tier one, the highest designation achieved by districts with low suspension rates and low racial/ethnic disparities in discipline data compared to all other districts.

### **Areas of Continued Growth**

- A review of SBS's Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) determined the APPM requires a policy amendment concerning the collection and depositing of cash and checks. School administration in cooperation with its Governing Board is preparing the required policy amendment.
- A review of SBS's Governing Board website revealed meeting activities do not contain agendas. The Governing Board is initiating this change.
- A review of the school's special education program determined that it does not meet the requirements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). School administration is working with the districts of residence to ensure that the requirements of LRE are being met.
- Staff from the CSDE, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification reviewed the state certified staff file and the school's employee roster. A review of SBS's staff member file determines 16.5 out of the school's staff of 18 staff members, 91.7 percent are in compliance with certification and are appropriately certified with full certificates (Initial, Provisional, Professional).
- One point five staff members, 8.3 percent are not in compliance. School administration is working with the CSDE, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification to develop a plan to bring staff into full compliance with teacher certification.
- In 2018-19, SBS's chronic absenteeism was at a low 4 percent, and too low to report to ensure student confidentiality in 2019-20. In 2020-21, during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced an increase to 20.4 percent, which is in keeping with the state rate of 19.0 percent, and the host district 21.2 percent. In the 2020-21 school year, students attended school in-person to varying degrees; some learned fully/mostly remotely for the entire school year.

### **Charter Renewal Recommendation**

SBS Charter School is providing its students, families, and community with a viable public school choice option, achieving its mission, and making strides in closing Connecticut's achievement gap. The school's suspension rates are well below the host district and state averages and have remained so over the three-year period (2018-19 through 2020-21). SBS's Tier 1 Discipline designation is representative of a school that equitably implements clear and consistent behavioral policies and procedures across the students it serves. While SBS's chronic absenteeism remained at a low in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, it experienced an increase in chronic absenteeism similar to that experienced by the host district and state. In response, school administration and staff have developed systems and supports to identify students and families with attendance issues, determine the root causes, and provide supports and resources to address barriers that negatively affect student attendance. Compared to the large statewide declines in proficiency rates during the pandemic for matched students who learned in a hybrid format (approximately six to seven percent in ELA and 16 to 17 percent in math), ELA achievement at SBS increased slightly, though the increase was less than those observed during a pre-pandemic period. In Math proficiency rates for SBS matched students increased. Based on SBS's performance indicators, together with the CSDE's evaluation of the charter, the CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school's charter for a period of five years, July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2027.

The CSDE will notify SBS of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on March 2, 2022. The school will be advised of relevant technical assistance opportunities designed to improve its educational program. The CSDE will conduct follow-up visits to ensure SBS is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly, Charter School Program Manager  
Turnaround Office

Reviewed by: Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director  
Turnaround Office

Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner

## CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | 2022

Charter School Information			
Charter School Name:	Side By Side Charter School		
School Director:	Matthew Nittoly		
School Board Chairperson:	Larry Cafero		
Location (City/Town):	Norwalk		
	<b>Rating Key:</b>		
<b>Meets</b>	The school demonstrates effective policies and practices, resulting in positive outcomes.		
<b>Pending Action</b>	The school requires minor modifications to its policies and/or practices. The school is taking satisfactory measures to remedy and address these issues in a timely manner.		
<b>Does Not Meet</b>	The schools falls below performance expectations with significant concerns noted, which require immediate attention and intervention.		
Standard 1: School Performance Indicators		Points/Max	% Points Earned
Accountability Index:		684.3/850	80.5
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>			
Side By Side Charter School’s (SBS’s) 2018-19 Accountability Index of 80.5 percent, is 6.3 percentage points above the state school Accountability Index of 74.2 percent. Schools that meet <b>Standard 1:</b> are schools earning an accountability index from 85 to 100 ( <b>Category 1</b> ), schools earning an accountability index from 70 to 84.9 percent ( <b>Category 2</b> ), and schools earning an accountability index of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School ( <b>Category 3</b> ). SBS’s Accountability Index score of 80.5 percent places its performance in Category 2, <b>which earns a pending action for Standard 1.</b> SBS’s 2018-19 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.			

# Next Generation Accountability, 2018-19 - Side By Side Charter School (Grades: PK-8)

## School Category: 2

Indicator	Index/Rate	Target	Points Earned	Max Points	% Points Earned	State Average % Points Earned
1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students	68.9	75	45.9	50	91.8	90.2
1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students	65.9	75	43.9	50	87.9	77.5
1c. Math Performance Index - All Students	67.8	75	45.2	50	90.4	84.1
1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students	65.2	75	43.5	50	87.0	70.2
1e. Science Performance Index - All Students	71.1	75	47.4	50	94.8	85.0
1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students	69.6	75	46.4	50	92.8	72.2
2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students	64.1%	100%	64.1	100	64.1	59.9
2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students	61.4%	100%	61.4	100	61.4	55.1
2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students	76.2%	100%	76.2	100	76.2	62.5
2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students	73.8%	100%	73.8	100	73.8	55.2
2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy	.	100%	.	.	.	60.0
2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral	.	100%	.	.	.	52.1
4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students	4.0%	<=5%	50.0	50	100.0	78.3
4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students	5.1%	<=5%	49.7	50	99.4	55.7
5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses	.	75%	.	.	.	100.0
6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams	.	75%	.	.	.	56.7
7. On-track to High School Graduation	.	94%	.	.	.	93.6
8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2018 Cohort)	.	94%	.	.	.	93.9
9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2016 Cohort)	.	94%	.	.	.	88.6
10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2018)	.	75%	.	.	.	94.5
11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = 100.0% )	55.1%	75%	36.7	50	73.4	70.6
12. Arts Access	.	60%	.	.	.	86.5
<b>Accountability Index</b>	.		684.3	850	80.5	74.2

### Gap Indicators

Indicator	Non-High Needs Rate	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean +1 Stdev	Is Gap an Outlier?
ELA Performance Index Gap	75.0	65.9	9.1	15.3	N
Math Performance Index Gap	73.7	65.2	8.5	17.4	N
Science Performance Index Gap	.	69.6	.	16.3	
Graduation Rate Gap (2016 Cohort)	.	.	.	.	

If the Non-High Needs Rate exceeds the ultimate target (75 for Performance Index and 94% for Graduation Rate), the ultimate target is used for gap calculations.  
If the size of the gap exceeds the state mean gap plus one standard deviation, the gap is an outlier.

### Assessment Participation Rates

Indicator	Participation Rate (%)
ELA - All Students	100.0
ELA - High Needs Students	100.0
Math - All Students	100.0
Math - High Needs Students	100.0
Science - All Students	100.0
Science - High Needs Students	100.0

Minimum participation standard is 95%.



Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance and Management Indicators:	Rating
2.1. Fiscal Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.2. Financial Reporting and Compliance	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.3. Financial Viability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.4. Governance and Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.5. School Facility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.1:</b> The CSDE site visit staff reviewed SBS's last three certified financial audits and uncovered no significant findings, conditions, or internal control weakness.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.2:</b> The CSDE site visit staff reviewed SBS's last certified financial audit, Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM), Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) and budgets, and interviewed the school Executive Director, Assistant Director, Business Office Manager, and governing board members. Staff from the CSDE's Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM and BPPM contains the standard sections of such documents. However, the APPM requires an amendment to include the collection of cash and checks to be submitted to the Business Office by days end and stored in a safe place, if unable to be deposited. The reviewers determined SBS completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets. The school is currently amending the APPM.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.3:</b> Staff from the CSDE's Office of Internal Audit reviewed SBS's latest certified financial audit and determined SBS's debt to asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities), unrestricted days of cash (unrestricted cash divided by ((total expenses minus depreciation expenses)/365 days)), cash flow (multi-year cash flow = year 3 total cash minus year 1 total cash; one-year cash flow = year 2 total cash minus year 1 total cash) and debt service coverage ratio (net income + depreciation + interest expense)/(principal + interest payments) meets or exceeds the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), signifying overall financial health.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.4:</b> A review of SBS's school policies regarding anti-nepotism and conflict of interest were found to be in compliance with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. SBS's policies and procedures regarding background checks of staff and board members, open board meetings and board membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. This finding is supported by a review of background checks, board training records, school website, and governing board meeting minutes. A review of SBS's Bylaws found them to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.5:</b> As evidenced during the site visit, SBS has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. The facility has been approved by the Bridgeport Fire Marshal and Building Department. The school has proof of property insurance.</li> </ul>	

Standard 3: Student Population Indicators	Rating
3.1. Recruitment and Enrollment Process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.2. Waitlist and Enrollment Data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.3. Demographic Representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.4. Family and Community Support	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.5. School Culture and Climate	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Indicator 3.1:</b> The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2020-21 reported 235 students in Grades PK-8 with 88.1 percent residing in Norwalk (the host district) and the remaining 11.9 percent coming from four area towns. A review of the school's student enrollment policy, and interviews with school staff, board members, and parents determined all students are admitted through a blind lottery. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 3.2:</b> A review of SBS's waitlist information (Table 5, page 14) determined that it maintains a waitlist of families beyond the available number of seats. In 2021-22, 74 students were on the waiting list. The waitlist has included more than 73 students each year for the past three years. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 3.3:</b> A review of SBS's 2018-19 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports students of color represent 87.7 percent of SBS's student population and 57.9 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced-priced meals. The English learner (ELs) population is 11.9 percent. The percentage of special education students at SBS is 8.5 percent. Overall, the student body reflects the demographics of the surrounding community. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 3.4:</b> SBS demonstrates strong community support, as evidenced by parent interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit. Parent focus groups described various communication methods between the school and families including texts, phone calls and written communication including translations in second languages, when necessary. Currently, parents report receiving regular reports from the school that detail student academics and behavior. Parents expressed support for what they perceive is a rigorous educational model that prepares their children for high school and beyond. Parents that indicated they were satisfied with the school's commitment to serving students with diverse needs. Students testified during the public hearing that they are happy with the educational choice opportunity the school provides. Over 45 individuals attended the November 9, 2021, renewal public hearing, and 19 individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of its charter. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 3.5:</b> School culture and climate policies reviewed by the CSDE site visit staff were clear and concise. Classroom observations revealed consistent implementation of behavior management model. The student focus group revealed a consistent theme of a family-feel to the school, where teachers and students respect one another, and students grow together over the years. In 2018-19 SBS's chronic absenteeism was at a low 4 percent, and too low to report to ensure student confidentiality in 2019-20. In 2020-21, during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced an increase to 20.4 percent, which is in keeping with the state rate of 19.0 percent, and the host district 21.2 percent. In the 2020-21 school year, students attended school in-person to varying degrees; some learned fully/mostly remotely for the entire school year. The school has developed systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance. SBS's 2020-21 student suspension rate is too low to report to ensure confidentiality. The state 1.4 percent and host district 1.0 percent are also low. The suspension rate at the school has remained at a low over the last three years. SBS's (latest available) 2018-19 and 2019-20 Discipline Tier has remained at one. This tier is the highest designation achieved by districts with low suspension rates and low racial/ethnic disparities in discipline data compared to all other districts. </li> </ul>	

Standard 4: Legal Compliance Indicators	Rating
4.1. Open Meetings/Information Management	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.2. Students with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.3. English Learners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.4. Rights of Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.5. Teacher/Staff Credentials, TEAM and EESP	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.6. Employee Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indicator 4.1:</b> The school website and Governing Board documents demonstrate that Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The Governing Board meeting schedule for the year are posted on the school's website. However, the agendas for the meeting were not. The Board is currently working to correct this. Education records and testing data are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 4.2:</b> A review of SBS 2020-21 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports the percentage of special education students at the school is 8.5 percent. SBS directly employs one special education teacher for K-8. As a result of scheduling limitations and constraints, most special education services are provided as a pull-out model. Students are grouped by grade and skill level. One student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that was randomly selected noted that study skills, written expression goals and objectives were to be in site 1 (general education classroom). When queried, the special education teacher reported that these services are not provided in general education classroom but are provided using a pull-out model. This does not meet the requirements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as determined by the student's IEP.</li> </ul> <p>LRE should be planned individually by the Planning Placement Team (PPT) for each student. It is not appropriate to have a model that is based on a general service provision approach (i.e., majority pull-out model). The PPT should always consider what supports and services a student requires to access the general education curriculum, and these services should be provided in the regular education classroom whenever appropriate for the individual child. Scheduling issues and constraints should not drive the model of service provision. Consideration of paraeducators as providers of specialized instruction that has been planned by the special education teacher is a consideration. The school administration is working with the districts of residence and school staff to ensure that the requirements of LRE are being met for each student per their IEP.</p> <p>Related services including speech and language, physical therapy, psychology, and social work services are provided through private contractors or district of residence staff as required.</p> <p>Student education files are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room. The school is ensuring that all files have individual sign-in access sheets. The reviewed files were well organized and maintained. PPT meetings are held by the school district in which the student resides. Parents/Guardians, students (as appropriate) and required PPT members from SBS are invited to participate in the meeting. The PPT develops, reviews, and revises the IEP based upon the student's individualized needs.</p>	

The special education teacher and assistant director request Professional Development/Technical Assistance (PD/TA) on how to differentiate between learning disabilities and learning loss as result of the pandemic. PD/TA to support increased provision of specialized instruction and related services within the general education classroom (including scheduling, paraeducator supervision/deployment) will help to support improvements in practices related to LRE. The CSDE, Bureau of Special Education and the State Education Resource Center (SERC) are currently in the process of arranging special education training for charter schools.

- **Indicator 4.3:** A review of SBS's 2020-21 PSIS data reports the percentage of students identified as ELs at the school is 11.9 percent. Through an analysis of the renewal materials and meetings with stakeholder groups, it became evident that SBS is highly committed to ensuring the success of Multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs) at the school. The school has taken actions that affirm this commitment to MLs/ELs by employing a certified Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher and by demonstrating the integration of ML/EL supports in the core curriculum. The school has also taken the required steps of a bilingual mandated district and completed the bilingual grant, posted for a certified bilingual teacher, and sent the TESOL in lieu letter to the Commissioner. The school is commended for taking these actions and providing a comprehensive collection of the ML/EL forms, procedures, and assessments in its Charter Renewal Application materials. SBS ensures that translation and interpretation continue to be available to families as needed, as it is the parents' right to receive information in a language that they understand.
- **Indicator 4.4:** SBS student rights policies and procedures include admissions, handling of student information, due process protections and state nondiscrimination laws. Interviews with parents and staff at the school supported the proper implementation and use of the policies.
- **Indicator 4.5:** Staff from the CSDE, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification reviewed the state certified staff file and the school's employee roster. A review of SBS's staff file determines 91.67 percent of its staff is in compliance with certification, with all but 1.5 percent full-time equivalent staff meet certification compliance. School administration is working with the CSDE, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification to ensure that staff members, who are not in compliance, develop a plan to fully comply with teacher certification requirements. SBS is in compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program and the Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP).
- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against SBS determined that no government agency alleged the violation of any law by the school or undertaken any investigation of any violation of law by the school.

Prepared by:	Reviewed by:	Approved by:
Robert Kelly, Charter School Program Manager	Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director Turnaround Office	Desi Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner

## SIDE BY SIDE CHARTER SCHOOL DATA

**Table 1: 2020-21 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information**

Grades served:	PK-8
Total enrollment:	235
Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals:	57.9
Percentage of special education students:	8.5
Percentage of students with limited English proficiency:	11.9
Percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students:	0
Percentage of Asian students:	*
Percentage of Black students:	25.1
Percentage of Hispanic students:	55.3
Percentage of Two or More Races:	*
Percentage of Caucasian students:	12.3

\*N<=5. Data suppressed to ensure student data privacy.

**Table 2: School Performance: All Students**

	2016-2017			2017-2018			2018-2019		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>Accountability Index</b>	77.2	76.9	73.2	73.5	76.8	74.9	80.5	75.6	74.2
<b>ELA-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index</b> (Target 75)	69.2	64.8	67.1	67.7	65.0	67.6	68.9	65.0	67.7
<b>Academic Growth</b> Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	57.9	58.5	55.4	62.7	58.8	60.7	64.1	60.4	59.9
<b>Math-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index</b> (Target 75)	69.3	59.8	62.2	67.3	60.8	62.7	67.8	60.7	63.1
<b>Academic Growth</b> Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	76.9	64.6	61.7	69.0	61.3	61.9	76.2	60.9	62.5

Table 3: School Performance-High Needs Students									
	2016-2017			2017-2018			2018-2019		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>ELA-High Needs Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index</b> (Target 75)	65.1	58.0	55.9	65.4	59.4	57.5	65.9	59.3	58.1
<b>Academic Growth</b> Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	59.2	55.2	49.8	61.1	57.4	55.6	61.4	57.3	55.1
<b>Math-High Needs Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index</b> (Target 75)	66.5	53.2	50.5	65.5	55.1	52.0	65.2	54.9	52.7
<b>Academic Growth</b> Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	78.4	60.9	53.7	69.3	58.8	55.4	73.8	57.0	55.2

Table 4: School Culture and Climate									
*Data are suppressed to ensure confidentiality									
	2018-2019			2019-2020 <sup>1</sup>			2020-2021 <sup>2</sup>		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>Chronic Absenteeism Rate</b>	4.0%	10.3%	10.4%	*	12.4%	12.2%	20.4%	21.2%	19.0%
<b>Suspension Rate</b>	*	5.0%	6.7%	*	3.7%	4.9%	*	1.0%	1.4%
<b>Discipline Tier</b>	1	3	3	1	3	3	1	3	1

Table 5: Student Waitlist and Mobility Information			
Performance Metric	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Waitlist number:	118	84	74
Number of enrolled students who left during the school year:	1	2	5
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school:	0	0	0

<sup>1</sup> In the 2019-20 school year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were cancelled in mid-March; all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year.

<sup>2</sup> In the 2020-21 school year, students attended school in-person to varying degrees; some learned fully/mostly remotely for the entire school year.



**Alexandra Estrella, Ed.D.**  
***Superintendent of Schools***

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Norwalk, CT 06852-6001

September 20, 2021

Mr. Robert Kelly  
Charter Schools Program Manager  
CT State Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

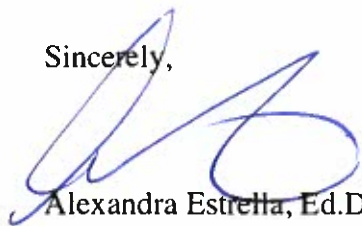
Dear Mr. Kelly,

It is a great pleasure to know that the CT State Board of Education will soon be reviewing Side by Side Charter School's application for renewal. As you know, Side by Side is one of the original charter schools in CT and has been successfully serving the children and families of Norwalk for more than 23 years. I am proud to give my support for Side by Side to receive the maximum 5-year renewal of their charter.

Side by Side has successfully provided the children and families of the Norwalk community with a unique opportunity for an early childhood, elementary and middle-school education. Through a curriculum rich in teaching children to socially and academically succeed and in providing programs and resources for families in need, Side by Side has grown to become a valued institution in this city.

It is with great pleasure that I support Side by Side in seeking renewal of its charter with the CT State Board of Education. I look forward to knowing that the future of education for the children and families of Norwalk includes the opportunities that are provided by Side by Side Charter School.

Sincerely,



Alexandra Estrella, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools





CITY OF NORWALK  
**Office of the Mayor**  
Harry W. Rilling

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Norwalk, CT 06856-5125

September 20, 2021

Mr. Robert Kelly  
Charter Schools Program Manager  
CT State Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Kelly,

It is a great pleasure to know that the CT State Board of Education will soon be reviewing Side by Side Charter School's application for renewal. As you know, Side by Side is one of the original charter schools in CT and has been successfully serving the children and families of Norwalk for more than 23 years. As the Mayor of the city of Norwalk, I am proud to give my support for Side by Side to receive the maximum 5-year renewal of their charter.

Since 1997 Side by Side has served as a regional public charter school located in the heart of South Norwalk. Side by Side has successfully provided the children and families of the Norwalk community with a unique opportunity for an early childhood, elementary and middle-school education. Through a curriculum rich in teaching children to socially and academically succeed and in providing programs and resources for families in need, Side by Side has grown to become a valued institution in this city.

It is with great pleasure that I support Side by Side in seeking renewal of its charter with the CT State Board of Education. I look forward to knowing that the future of education for the children and families of Norwalk includes the opportunities that are provided by Side by Side Charter School.

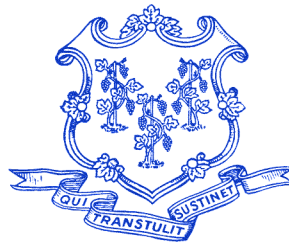
Sincerely,

Harry W. Rilling  
Mayor



SENATOR BOB DUFF  
MAJORITY LEADER

Twenty-fifth District  
*Norwalk & Darien*



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SENATE

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September 30, 2021

Mr. Robert Kelly  
Charter Schools Program Manager  
CT State Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Kelly,

This letter serves as my support of Side by Side Charter School's application for renewal. Based upon the close relationship that I have developed with Side by Side during my tenure as a state legislator, I am proud to give my support of their renewal.

As a lifelong Norwalk resident and former long-term substitute teacher, I have a first-hand understanding of the difficulties that public school systems are faced with. Children and their parents are fortunate to have options such as Side by Side in our city.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this letter of support for Side By Side School. Should you or any member of your staff have any other questions about my support, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bob Duff".

Bob Duff  
Senate Majority Leader