

# VII.C.

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

### To Be Proposed:

March 6, 2024

**Resolved**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's March 6, 2024, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

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

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 6, 2024  
**SUBJECT:** Renewal of State Charter: Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport

**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**

Great Oaks Charter School (Great Oaks) opened in the fall of 2014. Great Oaks is funded for a maximum approved student enrollment of 661 seats. The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reports 664 students in Grades 6-12, with 97.1 percent residing in Bridgeport (the host district) and 2.9 percent from 10 area towns. Of those students, 47.4 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals, 20.8 percent receive special education services, and 12.8 percent of students are identified as English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs). Table 1 on page 17 of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides the latest available audited 2022-23 student enrollment and demographic data. The mission of Great Oaks is to “prepare students for college success through high-dosage tutoring, quality instruction, and a focus on career and college readiness.”

On April 6, 2022, Great Oaks received a two-year charter renewal with conditions. Conditions stated in the 2022 renewal required Great Oaks to develop two corrective action plans; 1) to improve student academic achievement; and 2) to minimize behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions and by adopting a restorative discipline model for the school. Additionally, the school was cited for not being in compliance with teacher certification, Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program, and partial compliance with Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP).

## **Charter Renewal Process**

*Application for Renewal of Charter:* The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of Great Oaks’ charter on September 8, 2023. 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. Great Oaks 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, ELs/MLs, school management, finance, and school governance reviewed the renewal application and requested clarification and additional information where necessary.

*Renewal Site Visit:* On October 18, 2023, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at Great Oaks. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe Great Oaks programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school’s charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through 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 was 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 Great Oaks from the Superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) and from contiguous school districts: Fairfield, Stratford, and Trumbull. The CSDE received no responses to the solicitations.

*Public Hearing:* Martha Paluch Prou, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on January 18, 2024, in the City of Bridgeport, and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of Great Oaks and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the Great Oaks community, including members of the governing board, family members, students, graduates, school staff, and community members. Over 92 people attended the public hearing. Forty-two 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 Documents and Site Visit Findings**

The most recent available data and information contained in the Charter Renewal Report and the state student data (beginning on page 9) indicates Great Oaks' performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights the school's strengths and areas for continued growth.

#### **Areas of Strengths Include:**

- Great Oaks' 2022-23 Accountability Index score has increased 6.3 index points over the three years reported from 48.2 in 2018-19 to 54.5.
- Great Oaks' English language arts (ELA) Performance Index – All Students had experienced an increase of 3.6 index points, from an index of 48.3 in 2021-22 to an index of 51.9 in 2022-23, returning to within 0.4 index points of its pre-pandemic index of 52.3 in 2018-19.
- Great Oaks' ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students experienced an increase of 3.4 index points, from an index of 46.6 in 2021-22 to an index of 50.0 in 2022-23, exceeding the host district by 2.0 index points and nearing but below the state by 4.1 index points, and returning to within 0.7 index points of its pre-pandemic index of 50.7 in 2018-19.
- Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – All Students experienced an increase of 1.3 index points, from an index of 40.9 in 2021-22 to an index of 42.2 in 2022-23.
- Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students experienced an increase of 1.0 index point, from an index of 39.6 in 2021-22 to an index of 40.6 in 2022-23.
- Great Oaks' ELA Academic Growth – All Students experienced an increase of 20.6 percentage points from 49.3 percent in 2021-22 to 69.9 percent in 2022-23, exceeding the host district and state.
- Great Oaks' ELA Academic Growth – High Needs Students increased 21.5 percentage points from 48.0 percent in 2021-22 to 69.5 percent in 2022-23, exceeding the host district and state.

- Great Oaks' Mathematics Academic Growth – All Students increased 16.2 percentage points over the three years reported, 40.5 in 2018-19, 55.5 in 2021-22, and 56.7 in 2022-23, exceeding the host district by 6.4 percentage points and nearing but below the state by 5.1 percentage points.
- Great Oaks' Mathematics Academic Growth – High Needs Students increased 16.9 percentage points over the three years reported, 38.6 in 2018-19, 53.4 in 2021-22, and 55.5 in 2022-23, exceeding the host district by 5.6 percentage points and equal to the state.
- Great Oaks' Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 86.0 percent in 2021-22 exceeded the host district and was within 2.9 percentage points of the state average of 88.9 percent.
- Great Oaks demonstrated strong community support as evidenced by over 92 people attending the public hearing. Forty-two 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. Parents and students interviewed during the site visit were also supportive of the school and its efforts to serve children and families.
- A review of Great Oaks' Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program and Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) determined them to be in compliance. However, the TEAM requires the realigning of mentor assignments and one staff member is reestablishing their TEAM account to complete the program.
- Great Oaks' website and governing board documents demonstrate that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in Great Oaks' two most recent certified financial audits.
- A review of the school's finances found it to be financially viable.

**Areas for Continued Growth Include:**

- While Great Oaks' 2022-23 Accountability Index score has increased 6.3 index points over the three years reported from 48.2 in 2018-19 to 54.5, it has been below the host district and the state over the three years reported; in 2022-23 it was 2.2 percentage points below the host district and 14.8 percentage points below the state average.
- While Great Oaks' English language arts (ELA) Performance Index – All Students increased 3.6 index points in the last year. Great Oaks' ELA Performance Index – All Students was below the host district over the two years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and below the state in 2022-23. Great Oaks ELA Performance Index – All Students also decreased 0.4 index points from 52.3 in 2018-19 to 51.9 in 2022-23.
- While Great Oaks' ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students experienced an increase of 3.4 index points in 2021-22 to 2022-23, exceeding the host district by 2.0 index points, Great Oaks' ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 0.7 index points over the three years reported from an index of 50.7 in 2018-19, to an index of 50.0 in 2022-23.

- While Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – All Students experienced an increase of 1.3 index points, from an index of 40.9 in 2021-22 to an index 42.2 in 2022-23, Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – All Students has been below the host district and the state over the two years reported 2018-19, 2021-22 and the state in 2022-23, and has decreased 0.9 index points 42.2 in 2022-23.
- While Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students experienced an increase of 1.0 index points to an index of 40.6. in 2022-23, Great Oaks' Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 0.6 index points over the three reporting periods to an index of 40.6 in 2022-23, equal to the host district, and 8.3 index points below the state index of 48.9.
- A review of Great Oak's chronic absenteeism rate of 16.5 percent in 2019-20 showed they were 3.2 percentage points below the host district and 4.3 percentage points above the state. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school's chronic absenteeism rate experienced an increase of 13.9 percentage points to 30.4 percent, 2.6 percentage points above the host district of 27.8 percent and 6.7 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23 the school's chronic absenteeism rate increased again by 6.4 percentage points to 36.8 percent outpacing the host district by 8.2 percentage points and the state by 16.8 percentage points.
- Great Oaks' suspension rates of 14.3 percent in 2019-20 increased 3.1 percentage points during the midst of the pandemic to 17.4 percent in 2021-22, decreased 5.8 percentage points to 11.6 percent in 2022-23, 4.4 percentage points above the host district's 7.2 percent and 4.6 percentage points above the state average of 7.0 percent.
- Great Oak's 2022-23 Discipline Tier based on Suspension/Expulsion Data was Tier 2, above the host district's Tier 1 and below the state's Tier 3. A Tier 2 designates a school with consistently medium disproportionality: Not in Tiers 4 or 3 and either Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino Relative Risk Index (RRI)  $\geq 2$  in 2 recent years. While the RRI of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino students at Great Oaks has been reduced from 2021-22 and 2022-23, the goal for all schools is to be in Tier 1.
- A review of Great Oak's Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) by staff from the CSDE's Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM required amendments in the areas: credit card statement review, check signing threshold signatories, and establishing and maintaining assets on inventory.
- A review of Great Oak's employee roster and state certified staff file of February 21, 2024, determined that the school met the statutory requirement of having at least 50 percent of its staff with a Full Certificate. However, there are 4 staff who are not properly certified, 3 who have no active certificate on file and 1 who is serving in an assignment that does not match a valid endorsement. Great Oaks is also mandated to provide a bilingual program, and therefore the school must seek to employ a certified bilingual teacher. If this search does not yield a teacher, the school must request permission to use a TESOL-certified teacher in lieu of a bilingual teacher. Only a certified TESOL teacher can be used in an "in lieu" capacity. The school does not currently have staff who meet this requirement.

## **Conclusion**

Great Oaks Charter School provides its students, families, and community with a viable public school choice option, achieving its mission, and making strides in closing Connecticut's achievement gap. A review of the school's 2022-23 Discipline Tier 2 designation shows that while the school has consistently medium disproportionality in suspensions among Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino students, the suspension rates have been reduced over the last two years. Student suspension rates show that while students experienced an increase in the suspension rate during the midst of the pandemic to 17.4 percent in 2021-22, it was reduced 5.8 percentage points to 11.6 percent in 2022-23. As a condition of its last renewal, Great Oaks was required to develop a corrective action plan to address student discipline. The data show that while the school has not yet lowered its rate of suspensions to levels equal to or below the host district and state, there is evidence that its efforts to improve student behavior are being impactful. It's important that the work the school has been doing to improve student behavior continues, with an emphasis on reviewing its student discipline policies and procedures to ensure there are alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

The school's chronic absenteeism data show that attendance has become an issue at the school, increasing by 20.3 percentage points over the three years reported to 36.8 percent in 2022-23, exceeding that of the host district and state.

Great Oaks' Academic Growth ELA – All Students and High Needs Students have increased over 20.5 percentage points from 2021-22 to 2022-23 exceeding the host district and state averages. Its Academic Growth Mathematics – All Students and High Needs Students have increased over 16.1 percentage points over the three years reported, All Students exceeding the host district and nearing the state in 2022-23, and High Needs Students exceeding the host district and equal to the state in 2022-23. The school's ELA and Mathematics Performance Index – All Students and High Needs Students experienced increases from 2021-22 to 2022-23, nearing pre-pandemic levels. While Great Oaks performance was better or equal to the host district in 2022-23, performance was well below the state.

Great Oaks most recently reported Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate in 2021-22 exceeded the host district and was within 2.9 percentage points of the state average.

The school is out of compliance with teacher certification, including two staff members providing mandated bilingual services to eligible EL/ML students.

### **Charter Renewal Recommendation**

Great Oaks was cited for student suspensions, student academic achievement and teacher certification during its last renewal. During this renewal process, it was identified that Great Oaks needs improvement in the following areas: student academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, and teacher certification. The CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school's charter for a period of three years, subject to the following conditions:

1. By April 8, 2024, Great Oaks shall submit a revised corrective action plan to improve student academic achievement acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. Great Oaks shall engage in a root cause analysis of their utilizing the CSDE [Needs Assessment Toolkit \(ct.gov\)](#). The corrective action plan must include revisions to the identified strategies and action steps in the 2022 plan to improve student academic achievement. Great Oaks must continue strategies that have shown steady improvement over the past two years, abandon those that have not, and target areas requiring further growth and development. The CSDE Turnaround Office will provide intensive monitoring and support as Great Oaks undertakes this work. Great Oaks shall submit to the CSDE, on a bi-monthly basis beginning October 2024, a report monitoring its year-to-date progress of improving student academic achievement. Changes to the plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Turnaround Office.
2. By April 8, 2024, Great Oaks shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. The corrective action plan must target and address chronic absenteeism by: (a) isolating the root causes of chronic absenteeism; (b) identifying interventions to target causes; and (c) monitoring interventions and applying midcourse corrections, as necessary. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Turnaround Office. Great Oaks shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan. The CSDE will review on EdSight the school's chronic absenteeism data monthly and at the year-end, beginning October 2024. It is important for the school to reexamine, refine, and further develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance and reengage students' desire to attend class and learn.
3. By April 8, 2024, Great Oaks shall submit a plan for the CSDE review and approval to bring its staff into certification compliance, including EL/ML certification compliance by October 31, 2024, by: (a) ensuring staff responsible for hiring clearly understand the certification requirements of each position; (b) providing a clear pathway and support to certification with established milestones and timelines; (c) including monitoring and interventions for non-compliance; and (d) reporting of non-compliant staff including certification targets, schedules, and action steps, including responsible school staff, on August 1, 2024, to ensure compliance. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Talent Office and EL/ML consultant. Great Oaks shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan.



In October of 2024, Great Oaks administrative staff will meet with the Accountability and Support Committee of the SBE and provide a status update of its corrective action plan to address student academic achievement, student attendance, and teacher certification and EL/ML. At that time the Accountability and Support Committee members and department staff will analyze the student performance and teacher certification data to determine if the prioritized strategies in the corrective action plans are making a positive impact on student outcomes, attendance, and all staff providing instruction are properly certified. Dependent on the status of the issues discussed, Great Oaks administrative staff may be called back to meet with the Accountability and Support Committee to provide a second update in the spring of 2025, and bring forth an analysis of performance data and other metrics specific to each corrective action plan.

Recognizing that Great Oaks must adequately address student academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, and teacher certification through corrective actions, pursuant to Section 10-66bb(h) of the C.G.S., the Commissioner of Education may, at any time, place a charter school on probation if the school has failed to adequately demonstrate student progress or comply with applicable laws and regulations.

The CSDE will notify Great Oaks of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on March 6, 2024. 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 Great Oaks is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

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

Reviewed by: Irene E. Parisi, M.Ed.  
Chief Academic Officer

Approved by: Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.  
Deputy Commissioner for Academics & Innovation

**CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | 2022 - 23**

Charter School Information		
Charter School Name:	Great Oaks Charter School	
School Director/ Principal:	John Scalice	
School Board Chairperson:	Bob Carlson	
Location (City/Town):	Bridgeport	
Rating Key		
<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 school 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:	735.1/1350	54.5
Notes and Evidence:		
<p>Great Oaks Charter School (Great Oaks) 2022-23 Accountability Index of 54.5 percent is 14.8 percentage points below the state’s Accountability Index of 69.3 percent. Schools that meet <b>Standard 1:</b> are schools earning an accountability index score from 85 to 100 (<b>Category 1</b>), schools earning an accountability index score from 70 to 84.9 percent (<b>Category 2</b>), schools earning an accountability index score of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School (<b>Category 3</b>), and schools earning a three-year weighted average on the accountability index that is less than or equal to the fifth percentile of Connecticut Title I schools (<b>Category 4</b>). Great Oaks has been identified as a Turnaround school this year which places its performance in Category 4, <b>which earns a does not meet for Standard 1.</b> Great Oaks’ 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.</p>		

**Next Generation Accountability, 2022-23 – Great Oaks Charter School (Grades: 6-12)**  
**School Category: 4**

Indicator	Index/Rate	Target	Points Earned	Max Points	% Points Earned	State % Points Earned
1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students	51.9	75	34.6	50	69.2	85.2
1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students	50.0	75	33.3	50	66.6	72.1
1c. Math Performance Index - All Students	42.2	75	28.1	50	56.3	79.6
1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students	40.6	75	27.1	50	54.2	65.2
1e. Science Performance Index - All Students	43.0	75	28.7	50	57.3	82.1
1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students	42.0	75	28.0	50	56.0	68.2
2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students	69.9%	100%	69.9	100	69.9	57.2
2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students	69.5%	100%	69.5	100	69.5	52.5
2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students	56.7%	100%	56.7	100	56.7	61.8
2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students	55.5%	100%	55.5	100	55.5	55.5
2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy	42.1%	100%	21.1	50	42.1	55.3
2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral	48.5%	100%	24.3	50	48.5	56.1
4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students	36.8%	<=5%	0.0	50	0.0	39.8
4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students	39.2%	<=5%	0.0	50	0.0	6.0
5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses	33.1%	75%	22.1	50	44.1	100.0
6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams	15.4%	75%	10.3	50	20.6	59.0
7. On-track to High School Graduation	82.7%	94%	44.0	50	88.0	87.7
8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2022 Cohort)	86.0%	94%	91.5	100	91.5	94.6
9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2020 Cohort)	.	94%	.	.	.	91.1
10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2022)	33.3%	75%	44.4	100	44.4	88.2
11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = 97.8%)	12.9%	75%	0.0	50	0.0	60.6
12. Arts Access	55.4%	60%	46.2	50	92.4	90.9
<b>Accountability Index</b>	.		735.1	1350	54.5	69.3

**Gap Indicators**

Indicator	Non-High Needs Rate	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean +1 Standard Deviation	Is Gap an Outlier?
ELA Performance Index Gap	59.1	50.0	9.2	16.6	N
Math Performance Index Gap	48.3	40.6	7.6	18.0	N
Science Performance Index Gap	47.0	42.0	5.0	17.8	N
Graduation Rate Gap (2020 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	93.7
ELA - High Needs Students	93.4
Math - All Students	94.8
Math - High Needs Students	94.9
Science - All Students	92.5
Science - High Needs Students	92.2

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 Great Oaks’ last two 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 Great Oaks’ last three certified financial audits, Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM), Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM), budgets, and interviewed the school’s executive director, principals, director of operations, and governing board members. Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM contained the standard sections of an APPM. However, the APPM required amendments in the areas of credit card statement review and approval by the Board Treasurer, check signing threshold signatories, and establishing and maintaining assets on inventory. Great Oaks is separating from its Charter School Management Organization (CMO). The school must review and revise its APPM to reflect the changes to roles and responsibilities that have occurred as a result of its separation from the CMO. Additionally, the school must review its other manuals, including its Employee Handbook for necessary revisions due to the separation from the CMO. Lastly, the school must ensure that all revisions to its policy and procedures manuals are approved by the school governing board. The reviewers determined that Great Oaks completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 2.3:</b> Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit reviewed Great Oaks’ latest certified financial audit and determined its debt-to-asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), total margin (net income/total revenue), current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities), and days of unrestricted cash (unrestricted cash/((total expenditures – depreciation)/365)), 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 Great Oaks’ school policies regarding conflict of interest and nepotism were found to comply with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. Great Oaks’ policies and procedures regarding background checks of staff and board members, open board meetings, board membership, and membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. This finding is supported by a review of school policies and procedures, background checks, board training records, and the school’s website including board meeting minutes. A review of Great Oaks’ 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, Great Oaks 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 type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM

**Notes and Evidence:**

- Indicator 3.1:** The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reports 664 students in Grades 6-12 with 97.1 percent residing in Bridgeport (the host district) and 2.9 percent from 10 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.
- Indicator 3.2:** A review of Great Oaks’ waiting list information (Table 5, page 19) determined that the school maintains a waiting list of families beyond the available number of seats. The waiting list has included more than 428 students each year for the past three years.
- Indicator 3.3:** A review of Great Oaks’ latest CSDE audited Public School Information System (PSIS) data from 2022-23 reported 47.4 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students is 20.8 percent. Great Oaks’ English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) population is 12.8 percent.
- Indicator 3.4:** Great Oaks demonstrates strong community support, as evidenced by parent interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit. The parent focus group described various communication methods between the school and families, including texts, phone calls, emails, and written communication including translations in second languages, when necessary. Currently, parents report receiving regular updates from the school that detail student academics and behavior. Parents expressed support for what they perceive is a good educational model that prepares their children for high school and beyond. Parents indicated they were satisfied with the school’s commitment to serving students with diverse needs while providing a safe and nurturing environment. Students and graduates who testified during the public hearing on January 18, 2024, and student interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit reported they were generally happy with the school and choice opportunity that the school provides. Over 92 people attended the public hearing. Forty-two 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.
- Indicator 3.5:** Great Oaks’ suspension rates of 14.3 percent in 2019-20 increased 3.1 percentage points during the midst of the pandemic to 17.4 percent in 2021-22, decreased 5.8 percentage points to 11.6 percent in 2022-23, 4.4 percentage points above the host district’s 7.2 percent and 4.6 percentage points above the state average of 7.0 percent. It is important that the school continues to develop its restorative approach to minimize student behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions and review its discipline policies.

A review of Great Oak's chronic absenteeism rate of 16.5 percent in 2019-20 shows they were 3.2 percentage points below the host district and 4.3 percentage points above the state. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school's chronic absenteeism rate experienced an increase of 13.9 percentage points to 30.4 percent, 2.6 percentage points above the host district of 27.8 percent and 6.7 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23 the school's chronic absenteeism rate increased again by 6.4 percentage points to 36.8 percent, outpacing the host district by 8.2 percentage points and the state by 16.8 percentage points. It is important for the school to re-examine, refine, and further develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance and re-engage students' desire to attend class and learn.

Great Oak's 2022-23 Discipline Tier based on Suspension/Expulsion data was Tier 2, above the host district's Tier 1, and below the state's Tier 3. A Tier 2 designates a school with consistently medium disproportionality: Not in Tiers 4 or 3 and Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino students Relative Risk Index (RRI)  $\geq 2$  in 2 recent years. It is important that the school continues to develop its restorative approach to minimize student behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions and review its discipline policies and processes to ensure that they increase alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

Standard 4: Legal Compliance Indicators	Rating
4.1. Open Meetings/Information Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.2. Students with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.3. English Learners	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.6. Employee Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM

**Notes and Evidence:**

- Indicator 4.1:** The school’s website and governing board documents demonstrated that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The governing board’s meeting schedule for the year and meeting agendas are posted on the school’s website. Education records and testing data are kept in locked file cabinets in secure rooms.
- Indicator 4.2:** A review of Great Oaks’ latest audited 2022-23 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reported the percentage of special education students at the school is 20.8 percent. At the time of the site visit there were 117 special education identified students. A majority of the students with special education and related service needs reside in Bridgeport. To meet the needs of identified students, Great Oaks employed four full-time special education teachers and a Special Education Coordinator. Speech and language services, social work, occupational therapy, and physical therapy services are all provided by the sending districts in accordance with the student’s IEP. Great Oaks also employs two social workers which provide regular education supports. Related service providers from the sending districts sign in and out of the buildings and staff complete an electronic service log. The Special Education Coordinator monitors the service log and communicates with sending districts and parents, as needed, regarding missed services. Great Oaks works in collaboration with the LEAs when support is needed by a paraeducator. If a student has paraeducator support in their IEP, the LEA provides the paraeducator.

General education and special education teachers provide reading instruction to students. Specialized instruction in the area of reading is provided by the special education teachers. It was noted that reading instruction includes, but is not limited to, the use of Orton-Gillingham. Tutors also provide intervention services as needed. Great Oaks has special education students receiving instruction and support in both the general education classroom (push-in) and the resource classroom (pull-out) setting. Great Oaks employs a co-teaching model for students requiring push-in specialized instruction and support in accordance with their IEP. In these classrooms, the special education teacher was observed to be working with the regular education teacher to deliver the lesson and support students individually and in small groups.

Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) are scheduled in collaboration with Great Oaks and the sending district. Great Oaks utilizes the CT-SEDS system. The majority of PPT meetings are held on Tuesdays. Currently, Great Oaks staff generate the draft PPT invitation. Great Oaks staff attend all PPT meetings. The special education coordinator attends the PPT meetings as well as the student’s regular education teacher, special education teacher, and a related service provider from Great Oaks if the student does not have a related service provider from the LEA. Staff from the sending districts that attend PPT meetings include the special education administrator from the Bridgeport Public Schools, and any applicable related service providers for the student including a school psychologist. Great Oaks special education staff enter information in the student’s draft IEP including present levels of performance, draft goals and objectives, and accommodations and modifications. The sending district finalizes the IEP which is then made available on the parent portal. Great Oaks will send parents/guardians a paper copy if they request it. Great Oaks also assists parents in obtaining a translated IEP and other applicable documents in their primary language.

The IEPs were stored in locked file cabinets in the special education office which is always locked. The files were neatly organized and contained all pertinent information. There was a sign-out sheet in the front of each file that was randomly reviewed.

The school is aware of their Child Find responsibilities. The classroom teachers reach out to the special education coordinator if they have concerns. The special education coordinator stated that student progress is constantly being reviewed. School staff use a variety of data including progress monitoring, student performance in class, teacher reports, state testing results, and baseline assessments. Based on the data, Great Oaks will request a PPT meeting through the sending district to refer the student to special education and to consider/plan an initial evaluation. It was also noted that parents may make referrals for their children as well.

- **Indicator 4.3:** A review of Great Oaks' latest audited 2022-23 PSIS data reports indicated that the percentage of students identified as English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) at the school is 12.8 percent. Through an analysis of the renewal materials and meeting with school staff, it became evident that Great Oaks is committed to ensuring the success of ELs/MLs at the school. The school has taken actions that affirm this commitment to ELs/MLs by employing knowledgeable and passionate staff members focused on supporting the language instruction program needs of students and by building capacity of general educators to serve ELs/MLs. Great Oaks is commended for its participation in the Seal of Biliteracy, work to assure language access for families through translation and interpretation, and its assets orientation to multilingualism in the school community.

Additionally, the school has built collaborative partnerships with Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI), resulting in a broadening in the enrollment of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The school's population of EL/ML students is growing, and the school has worked to develop scheduling for the teachers and fellows to enable the students to receive language instruction in addition to core instruction. They are doing this through push-in and pull-out support based on their language proficiency level, particular needs, and academic schedule. Great Oaks works to provide training to teachers to enable them to integrate support for ELs/MLs and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in the core curriculum. The school has applied for both the Title III grant funds and bilingual grant funds for which it is eligible, as it has done in preceding years.

It is evident that the school has strived to align its practices with state and federal requirements and that work should continue in this area. Additionally, there is clear evidence of work to better understand each EL's/ML's language needs across domains and to provide targeted support to address them. A review of the school's EL/ML screening and identification materials were in good order. The two staff serving the needs of EL/ML identified students at the school were not certified in TESOL nor did they have other certifications on record. The district must seek to employ a certified bilingual teacher. If this search does not yield a teacher, the school must request permission to use a TESOL-certified teacher in lieu of a bilingual teacher and must include the name and 10-digit EIN of the teacher as well as an explanation of how native language support will be provided. Only a certified TESOL teacher can be used in this "in lieu" capacity. The school does not currently have staff that meet this requirement.



- **Indicator 4.4:** Great Oaks 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:** A review of Great Oaks' staff file of February 21, 2024, reported 93.7 percent of staff in compliance with certification. It is the responsibility of the school to take steps to ensure that 100 percent of the staff hold appropriate certificates, permits, or authorizations for their positions. Of the 63 staff members requiring certification, 59 staff members or 93.7 percent, hold a valid certificate or other temporary certificate, permit, or authorization. The school met the statutory requirement of having at least 50 percent of its staff with a Full Certificate. However, there are 4 staff who are not properly certified, 3 who have no active certificate on file and 1 who is serving in an assignment that does not match a valid endorsement.

Great Oaks is in compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program; however, TEAM requires the realigning of mentor assignments, and one staff member is reestablishing their TEAM account to complete the program.

Great Oaks is in compliance with Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP).

- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against Great Oaks determined that no government agency alleged the violation of any law by the school or has undertaken any investigation of any violation of law by the school.

<b>Prepared by:</b>	<b>Reviewed by:</b>
Robert E. Kelly Charter School Program Manager	Irene E. Parisi Chief Academic Officer

**GREAT OAKS CHARTER SCHOOL DATA TABLES**

**Table 1: 2022-23 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information**

Grades served:	6-12
Total enrollment:	664
Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals:	47.4
Percentage of students with disabilities:	20.8
Percentage of students identified as English Learners:	12.8
Percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students:	*
Percentage of Asian students:	*
Percentage of Black or African American students:	43.4
Percentage of Hispanic or Latino students:	51.2
Percentage of Two or More Races:	1.1
Percentage of White students:	3.3

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

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

	2018-19			2021-22			2022-23		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>Accountability Index</b>	48.2	61.2	74.2	48.8	59.8	69.7	54.5	56.7	69.3
<b>ELA-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index (Target 75)</b>	52.3	54.3	67.7	48.3	50.1	64.2	51.9	49.5	63.9
<b>Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)</b>	58.3	53.4	59.9	49.3	60.5	60.4	69.9	49.5	57.2
<b>Math-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index (Target 75)</b>	43.1	46.4	63.1	40.9	42.1	58.6	42.2	41.8	59.7
<b>Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)</b>	40.5	52.6	62.5	55.5	56.6	65.2	56.7	50.3	61.8
<b>Graduation-All Students</b>									
<b>Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)</b>	N/A	76.0	88.5	86.0	74.2	88.9	N/A	N/A	N/A

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

Table 3: School Performance-High Needs Students									
	2018-19			2021-22			2022-23		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>ELA-High Needs Students</b>									
Performance Index (Target 75)	50.7	52.3	58.1	46.6	48.2	54.2	50.0	48.0	54.1
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	55.6	52.4	55.1	48.0	59.5	56.2	69.5	48.9	52.5
<b>Math-High Needs Students</b>									
Performance Index (Target 75)	41.2	44.6	52.7	39.6	40.4	47.7	40.6	40.6	48.9
Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%)	38.6	51.8	55.2	53.4	55.1	59.1	55.5	49.9	55.5
<b>Graduation-High Needs Students</b>									
Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)	N/A	79.9	85.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

Table 4: School Culture and Climate									
	2019-2020 <sup>1</sup>			2021-2022			2022-2023		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%)	16.5	19.7	12.2	30.4	27.8	23.7	36.8	28.6	20.0
Suspension Rate (%)	14.3	9.4	4.9	17.4	7.0	6.5	11.6	7.2	7.0
Discipline Tier	4	2	3	1	2	1	2	1	3

Table 5: Great Oaks Student Wait List and Mobility Information				
Performance Metric:		2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Waiting number:		429	558	443
Number of enrolled students who left during the school year:		97	110	111
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school:		96	105	110

<sup>1</sup> For the 2019-20 school year, chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020. See the [Report Notes](#) for additional information.