

VII.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:

April 3, 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 Highville Charter School from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's April 3, 2024, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this third day of April, 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: April 3, 2024
Subject: Renewal of State Charter: Highville Charter School, New Haven

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

Highville Charter School (Highville) opened in the fall of 1998. Highville has the maximum approved student enrollment of 502 seats. The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2023-24 reports 504 students in Grades K-12, with 59.9 percent residing in New Haven (the host district), 24.0 percent residing in Hamden, and 16.1 percent from 12 area towns. Of those students, 72.2 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals, 8.7 percent receive special education services, and students identified as English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) at the school is data suppressed. Table 1 on page 15 of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides the latest available audited 2023-24 student enrollment and demographic data. The mission of Highville is to provide “an enterprising and caring community with strong parent and community involvement, which prepares and instills a desire for all learners to confidently use technology, think globally and develop into globally conscious citizens...”

On June 3, 2020, Highville received a three-year charter renewal with conditions. Conditions stated in the 2020 renewal required Highville to develop two corrective action plans: 1) improve student academic achievement; and 2) bring its staff into certification compliance by October 31, 2020. Due to implications of the pandemic, the SBE approved a one-year extension on July 14, 2020; the school’s charter will expire June 30, 2024.

Charter Renewal Process

Application for Renewal of Charter: The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of Highville’s 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. Highville 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 November 14, 2023, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at Highville. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe Highville 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 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 Highville from the Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) and from contiguous school districts: East Haven, Hamden, North Haven, Orange, West Haven, and Woodbridge. The CSDE received a letter from Vonda J. Tencza, Superintendent, Woodbridge School District (see Attachment A), which provided no reason or comment that reflects poorly on the school. The CSDE received no letters against the renewal of the school's charter.

Public Hearing: Erik Clemons, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on February 6, 2024, in the City of New Haven and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of Highville and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the Highville community, including members of the governing board, family members, students, graduates, school staff, and community members. Over 88 people attended the public hearing. Thirty 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 8) indicates Highville's performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights the school's strengths and areas for continued growth.

Areas of Strengths Include:

- Highville's English language arts (ELA) Performance Index – High Needs Students exceeded the host district in 2022-23 by 0.8 index points and experienced an increase of 0.6 index points, from an index of 48.0 in 2021-22 to an index of 48.6 in 2022-23.
- Highville's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students experienced an increase of 0.5 index points, from an index of 42.4 in 2021-22 to an index of 42.9 in 2022-23.
- Highville's Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students has exceeded the host district over the three reporting periods: 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23 and experienced an increase of 0.2 index points, from an index of 40.6 in 2021-22 to an index of 40.8 in 2022-23.
- Highville's suspension rate of 9.4 percent in 2022-23 was near, but above the host district (1.7 percentage points) and the state (2.4 percentage points).
- Highville's 2022-23 Discipline Tier, Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data was Tier 1, which is below the host district and below the state. Tier 1 is the designation for a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.
- Highville 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.
- A review of Highville's Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program and Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) determined Highville to be in compliance.
- Highville's website and governing board documents demonstrate that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The school's Board has been reminded of its responsibility to consistently post its board and subcommittee meeting minutes to its website in a timely manner.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in Highville's last three most recent certified financial audits.
- A review of the school's finances found it to be financially viable.

Areas for Continued Growth Include:

- Highville’s 2022-23 Accountability Index score of 47.8 is below the host district and state averages, decreased 3.6 index points from 51.4 in 2021-22, and has decreased 24.9 index points from 72.7 in 2018-19.
- Highville’s ELA Performance Index – All Students is below the host district and the state and did not increase in performance over the last two years reported, 2021-22 and 2022-23, remaining at an index of 50.3.
- Whereas Highville’s ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students exceeded the host district in 2022-23 by 0.8 index points and experienced an increase of 0.6 index points from an index of 48.0 in 2021-22 to an index of 48.6 in 2022-23, Highville’s ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students decreased 8.9 index points over the three reporting periods from an index of 57.5 in 2018-19 to an index of 48.6 in 2022-23, and was below the state over the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- While Highville’s Mathematics Performance Index – All Students experienced an increase of 0.5 index points, from an index of 42.4 in 2021-22 to an index of 42.9 in 2022-23, Highville’s Mathematics Performance Index – All Students decreased 7.5 index points from an index of 50.4 in 2018-19 to an index of 42.9 in 2022-23, and was below the state over the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- Whereas Highville’s Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students exceeded the host district over the three reporting periods 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23 and experienced an increase of 0.2 index points, from an index of 40.6 in 2021-22 to an index of 40.8 in 2022-23, Highville’s Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students decreased 8.1 index points over the three reporting periods from an index of 48.9 in 2018-19 to an index of 40.8 in 2022-23.
- Highville’s ELA Academic Growth – All Students decreased 1.5 percentage points from 53.5 percent in 2021-22, to 52.0 percent in 2022-23, below the host district and the state in 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- Highville’s ELA Academic Growth – High Needs Students decreased 3.7 percentage points from 53.4 percent in 2021-22, to 49.7 percent in 2022-23, below the host district and the state in 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- Highville’s Mathematics Academic Growth – All Students decreased 5.8 percentage points from 52.4 percent in 2021-22 to 46.6 percent in 2022-23, and performed below the host district and state in 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- Highville’s Mathematics Academic Growth – High Needs Students decreased 9.9 percentage points from 52.5 percent in 2021-22 to 42.6 percent in 2022-23, and performed below the host district and state in 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- A review of Highville’s chronic absenteeism rate of 13.7 percent in 2019-20 showed they were below the host district and near, but above, the state average. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school’s chronic absenteeism rate increased 35.2 percentage points to 48.9 percent, 9.2 percentage points below the host district of 58.1 percent and 25.2 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23, the school reduced its chronic absenteeism rate by 20.8 percentage points to 28.1 percent, 8.5 percentage points below the host district average of 36.6 percent and 8.1 percentage points above the state average of 20.0 percent.

- A review of Highville’s Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) by staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM contained the standard sections of an APPM. However, the APPM required the following amendments: further segregation of duties pertaining to preparing and signing blank checks on behalf of the school; contract thresholds requiring Board approval must be lowered; bidding procedures, including thresholds for bidding, guidelines for acceptable methods and documentation requirements of quotes and bids; special education billing process; establishing and maintaining assets purchased with federal funds; and policy that prohibits personal use of school facilities. Highville will develop amendments to its Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual to address these recommendations and its school’s governing board will review and approve the amendments.
- The governing board has specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management and the management team. However, the roles and responsibilities are not formally documented in a Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) to ensure consistency and continuity. To ensure the continuity of key oversight activities, the roles and responsibilities of the Board must be written into a BPPM, including the duties of each subcommittee. Highville will develop a board policy to define the roles and responsibility of its governing board, including the board’s committees. Highville’s governing board will review and approve the BPPM.
- Through the review of Highville’s EL/ML materials it was determined that written procedures in the following areas were required: Home Language Survey, Parent Notification Letter, Exit Procedure Letter, develop an EL/ML assessment calendar, and create an electronic filing for the EL/ML procedures.
- A review of Highville’s staff file of March 15, 2024, reported 60.6 percent of staff are 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 33 staff members requiring certification, 20.0 staff members, or 60.6 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, 13 staff members, or 39.4 percent, are not properly certified: 9 who have no active certificate on file, 1 serving a grade that does not match a valid endorsement, and 3 serving in assignments that do not match a valid endorsement.

Conclusion

Highville Charter School provides its students, families, and community with a viable public school choice option and achieving its mission. A review of Highville’s suspension rates reveal it was above, but in keeping with the state and host district averages in 2022-23. Highville’s Tier 1 Discipline designation in 2022-23 is representative of a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.

The school’s chronic absenteeism rate was below the host district and near the state average in 2019-20. During the pandemic in 2021-22, the school experienced a 35.2 percentage point increase, below the host district and above the state average. Highville achieved a 20.8 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism in 2022-23, 8.5 percentage points below the host district and 8.1 percentage points above the state average. The school must further refine and develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance.

The school's Accountability Index has remained below the host district and the state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and has decreased 24.9 index points over the three years reported. Highville's ELA Performance Index – All Students has been below the host district and the state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and achieved no increase in performance during the last two years reported. The ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students has been below the host district and state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and achieved a small increase during the last two years reported. The school's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students and High Needs Students has been above or very near the host district and below the state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and increased slightly during the last two years reported. Its ELA Academic Growth – All Students and High Needs Students has declined over the three years reported and were below the host district and state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23. Highville's Mathematics Academic Growth – All Students and High Needs Students has declined over the three years reported and were below the host district and state averages in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Charter Renewal Recommendation

Highville was cited for student academic achievement and teacher certification during its last renewal. During this renewal process it was identified that Highville needs improvement in the areas of: 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 May 6, 2024, Highville shall submit a revised corrective action plan to improve student academic achievement acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. Highville shall engage in a root cause analysis utilizing the CSDE [Needs Assessment Toolkit \(ct.gov\)](https://www.csde.ct.gov/NeedsAssessmentToolkit). The corrective action plan must include revisions to the identified strategies and action steps in the 2020 corrective action plan to improve student academic achievement. Additionally, Highville must utilize the CSDE Acceleration Cycle as a framework for developing and implementing an improvement plan to address learning acceleration, learning recovery, and student enrichment because of the pandemic. The school must convene a team to develop and monitor the implementation of the revised plan that intentionally addresses unfinished learning while focusing on the teaching of prioritized, essential content, and maintaining a high level of rigor for all learners. Highville 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. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Turnaround Office. Highville shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan.
2. By May 6, 2024, Highville 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. Highville 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 May 6, 2024, Highville shall submit a plan to bring its staff into 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 Talent Office and approved by the CSDE. Highville shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education's acceptance of the plan.

In October 2024, Highville 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 achievement, student discipline, and teacher certification. At that time the Accountability and Support Committee members and department staff will analyze the performance data and teacher certification data to determine if the prioritized strategies in the corrective action plans are making a positive impact on student outcomes, teacher practice, and all staff providing instruction are properly certified. Dependent on the status of the issues discussed, Highville 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 Highville must adequately address student 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 Highville of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on April 3, 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 Highville 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: | Highville Charter School | |
| School Director/ Principal: | Che Dawson | |
| School Board Chairperson: | Linda Baylor | |
| Location (City/Town): | New Haven | |
| Rating Key | | |
| Meets | The school demonstrates effective policies and practices, resulting in positive outcomes. | |
| Pending Action | 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. | |
| Does Not Meet | 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: | 501.7/1050 | 47.8 |
| Notes and Evidence: | | |
| <p>Highville Charter School’s (Highville) 2022-23 Accountability Index of 47.3 percent is 21.5 percentage points below the state’s Accountability Index of 69.3 percent. Schools that meet Standard 1: are schools earning an accountability index score from 85 to 100 (Category 1), schools earning an accountability index score from 70 to 84.9 percent (Category 2), and schools earning an accountability index score of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School (Category 3). Highville’s Accountability Index score of 47.3 percent places its performance in Category 3, which earns a Does Not Meet for Standard 1. Highville’s 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.</p> | | |

Next Generation Accountability, 2022-23 – Highville Charter School (Grades: PK-12)
School Category: 3

| Indicator | Index/Rate | Target | Points Earned | Max Points | % Points Earned | State % Points Earned |
|---|------------|--------|---------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students | 50.3 | 75 | 33.5 | 50 | 67.0 | 85.2 |
| 1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students | 48.6 | 75 | 32.4 | 50 | 64.8 | 72.1 |
| 1c. Math Performance Index - All Students | 42.9 | 75 | 28.6 | 50 | 57.1 | 79.6 |
| 1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students | 40.8 | 75 | 27.2 | 50 | 54.4 | 65.2 |
| 1e. Science Performance Index - All Students | 43.8 | 75 | 29.2 | 50 | 58.4 | 82.1 |
| 1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students | 41.7 | 75 | 27.8 | 50 | 55.6 | 68.2 |
| 2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students | 52.0% | 100% | 52.0 | 100 | 52.0 | 57.2 |
| 2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students | 49.7% | 100% | 49.7 | 100 | 49.7 | 52.5 |
| 2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students | 46.6% | 100% | 46.6 | 100 | 46.6 | 61.8 |
| 2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students | 42.6% | 100% | 42.6 | 100 | 42.6 | 55.5 |
| 2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy | . | 100% | . | . | . | 55.3 |
| 2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral | . | 100% | . | . | . | 56.1 |
| 4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students | 28.1% | <=5% | 3.8 | 50 | 7.6 | 39.8 |
| 4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students | 32.4% | <=5% | 0.0 | 50 | 0.0 | 6.0 |
| 5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses | 25.9% | 75% | 17.3 | 50 | 34.6 | 100.0 |
| 6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams | 7.4% | 75% | 4.9 | 50 | 9.9 | 59.0 |
| 7. On-track to High School Graduation | 81.6% | 94% | 43.4 | 50 | 86.8 | 87.7 |
| 8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2022 Cohort) | . | 94% | . | . | . | 94.6 |
| 9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2020 Cohort) | . | 94% | . | . | . | 91.1 |
| 10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2022) | . | 75% | . | . | . | 88.2 |
| 11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = 87.8%) | 37.6% | 75% | 12.5 | 50 | 25.1 | 60.6 |
| 12. Arts Access | 60.3% | 60% | 50.0 | 50 | 100.0 | 90.9 |
| Accountability Index | . | . | 501.7 | 1050 | 47.8 | 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 | 57.0 | 48.6 | 8.3 | 16.6 | N |
| Math Performance Index Gap | 51.2 | 40.8 | 10.3 | 18.0 | N |
| Science Performance Index Gap | . | 41.7 | . | 17.8 | |
| 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 | 98.6 |
| ELA - High Needs Students | 98.3 |
| Math - All Students | 98.6 |
| Math - High Needs Students | 98.3 |
| Science - All Students | 97.6 |
| Science - High Needs Students | 98.4 |

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 |
| Notes and Evidence: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 2.1: The CSDE site visit staff reviewed Highville’s last three certified financial audits and uncovered no significant findings, conditions, or internal control weakness. Indicator 2.2: The CSDE site visit staff reviewed Highville’s 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 the following amendments: further segregation of duties pertaining to preparing and signing blank checks on behalf of the school; contract thresholds requiring Board approval must be lowered; bidding procedures, including thresholds for bidding, guidelines for acceptable methods and documentation requirements of quotes and bids; special education billing process; establishing and maintaining assets purchased with federal funds; and policy that prohibits personal use of school facilities. The school will develop amendments to its Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual to address these recommendations and its school’s governing board will review and approve the amendments. The Board is not reviewing and approving updates to the APPM, BPPM, and Employee and Student Handbooks. The Board must review and approve the APPM and all other school policy manuals on an annual basis to ensure that they are updated to reflect necessary changes to policies and procedures in a timely manner. Board approval must be reflected in the meeting minutes. The governing board has specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management and the management team. However, the roles and responsibilities are not formally documented in a Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) to ensure consistency and continuity. To ensure the continuity of key oversight activities, the roles and responsibilities of the Board must be written into a BPPM, including the duties of each subcommittee. Highville will develop a BPPM to define the roles and responsibility of its governing board, including the board’s committees. The school’s governing board will review and approve the BPPM. Indicator 2.3: Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit reviewed Highville’s latest certified financial audit and determined its debt-to-asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities), days of unrestricted cash (unrestricted cash/((total expenditures – depreciation)/365)), and cash flow (change in cash balance) meets or exceeds the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), signifying overall financial health. Indicator 2.4: A review of Highville’s school policies regarding conflict of interest and nepotism was found to comply with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. Highville’s 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 Highville’s bylaws found them to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. The school’s Board is reminded of its responsibility to consistently post its board and subcommittee meeting minutes to its website in a timely manner. Indicator 2.5: As evidenced during the site visit, Highville has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. The facilities have been approved by the New Haven Fire Marshal and Building Department. The school has proof of property insurance for the facilities. | |

| 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 type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" 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: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>Indicator 3.1: The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2023-24 reports 504 students in Grades PK-12, 59.9 percent residing in New Haven (the host district), 24.0 percent residing in Hamden and 16.1 percent from 12 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.</p> <p>Indicator 3.2: A review of Highville’s waiting list information (Table 5, page 17) determined that the school maintains a waiting list of families beyond the available number of seats. The waiting list has included more than 146 students each year for the past three years.</p> <p>Indicator 3.3: A review of Highville’s latest CSDE audited Public School Information System (PSIS) data from 2022-23 reported 72.2 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students is 8.7 percent. Highville’s English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) population is data suppressed. To better reflect the demographics of the surrounding community, the school must seek to enroll more students who are ELs/MLs.</p> <p>Indicator 3.4: Highville 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 February 6, 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 89 people attended the public hearing. Thirty 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.</p> <p>Indicator 3.5: Highville’s suspension rate in 2019-20 was 11.9 percent. Highville’s suspension rate was incorrectly reported in 2021-22, therefore the CSDE does not have data to report for the 2021-22 school year. Highville’s suspension rate of 9.4 percent in 2022-23 was near, but above the host district (1.7 percentage points) and the state (2.4 percentage points).</p> <p>Highville’s 2022-23 Discipline Tier, Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data was Tier 1, which is below the host district and below the state. Tier 1 is the designation for a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.</p> <p>A review of Highville’s chronic absenteeism rate of 13.7 percent in 2019-20 showed they were below the host district and near but above the state average. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school’s chronic absenteeism rate experienced an increase of 35.2 percentage points to 48.9 percent, 9.2 percentage points below the host district of 58.1 percent and 25.2 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23, the school reduced its chronic absenteeism rate by 20.8 percentage points to 28.1 percent, 8.5 percentage points below the host district average of 36.6 percent and 8.1 percentage points above the state average of 20.0 percent. It is important for the school to continue to refine and develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance.</p> | |

| 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 type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM |
| 4.3. English Learners | <input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" 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 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: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 4.1: The school’s website and governing board documents demonstrate 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 Highville’s latest audited 2023-24 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reported the percentage of special education students at the school is 8.7 percent. There are currently 45 students with special education and related services attending Highville. Highville employs three full-time special education teachers. These special education teachers are hired by Highville, and the sending districts are billed for reimbursement of services. Related service providers for speech and language services, school-based counseling, occupational therapy, and physical therapy are all sent to Highville by the sending districts to provide related services in accordance with each student’s individualized education program (IEP). Highville employs two school social workers that support 504 plans as well as regular education students. If needed, the school social workers are also able to support school-based counseling through an IEP. Related service providers from the sending districts sign in and out of the building as well as email Highville if they are not going to be in the building on a certain day. They do not complete service logs. The completion of related service logs must be implemented to allow the school and the sending districts to accurately monitor delivery of related services. These logs assist with monitoring and tracking any missed services that would need to be made up. Documentation of a related services tracking log will satisfy this requirement. <p>General education and special education teachers provide instruction to special education students in accordance with each student’s IEP. Specialized instruction is provided by the special education teachers. The special education teachers utilize a variety of resources to support their students including (but not limited to) SIPPS, Big Idea, Engage NY, and Bridges Number Corner. Core Phonics and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are used to monitor student progress and identify instructional focus areas. Modified curriculum within the different programs is also used to support students. Students were observed working with special education teachers in the general education classroom and the resource classroom setting across grade levels. Push-in, or classroom support, was observed as a special education teacher supporting a student to meet the lesson’s objectives. Pull-out, or resource room services, were observed in small groups. Students were offered a quick movement break and then began working. The special education teacher supported students on their individual work and managed different assignments within the same small group.</p> <p>Special education staff meet with general education teachers to review IEPs. Meetings are held at the beginning of the school year to review IEPs and accommodations and modifications. Meetings between general education and special education teachers are also held throughout the school year for any new students that join Highville with an IEP and on an as-needed basis for existing special education students. Collaborative planning is based on the students’ needs. The special education teachers support the general education teachers with accommodations and modifications. The special education teachers participate in the elementary and high school grade level meetings. The special education teachers offer “office hours” on Fridays where general education teachers can check in with the special education teachers and receive support for individual students. There are also opportunities for the special education teachers to observe in classrooms and offer additional support and guidance. Special education teachers review student data and curriculum and support the</p> | |

differentiation of instruction for teachers and students. Students have access to regular small group instruction to support their needs both in and out of the classroom.

The files were neatly organized and kept in a locking file cabinet in the special education classroom that also locks. The files contained updated IEPs, progress monitoring data, and transition goals when applicable.

Planning and Placement Team meetings (PPTs) are scheduled by the sending district/LEA who also creates the PPT Invitation. Highville uses the CT-SEDS system. Special education teachers and related service providers input student information directly into the system in collaboration with the LEA. The sending district finalizes the IEP. The Highville staff who attend PPT meetings include the general education teacher, the special education teacher, interventionists, school social worker as applicable, and a dean of students. A PPT chair from the sending district attends PPT meetings as well as a district school psychologist as applicable and the related services providers who work with the student.

The school is aware of their Child Find responsibilities. The school stated that when there are academic or behavioral concerns, they reach out to the parents/guardians of students and to the sending district. Highville supports students through the SRBI process providing them with necessary tiers of intervention. In collaboration with the sending district, Highville will initiate a referral to special education if concerns continue despite intervention support.

Highville has two behaviorists on staff to provide students with push-in or pull-out behavioral support. The school has designated SEL rooms that students can access to de-escalate and process any concerns they are experiencing. Students needing additional support have access to individualized behavior plans. Teachers and staff keep parents/guardians informed of students' needs and progress. Meetings are held regularly, and staff review progress monitoring data to determine how to best support the students. Highville's crisis team consists of the principal, deans, behaviorists, school social worker, and school nurse. Highville's security team are currently the only staff in the building that are Physical Management Training. Highville must have members of their crisis team trained in seclusion and restraint. Highville's principal, director of business operations, director of wellness and justice, two deans, and two behaviorists received the required training in February 2024 to satisfy this requirement.

- **Indicator 4.3:** Through an analysis of the renewal materials and meeting with stakeholder groups, it is evident that there is an opportunity for growth in understanding among staff of obligations regarding the instruction, assessment, and notifications for English learners/Multilingual learners (ELs/MLs) at the school. The school leaders voiced a commitment to enhancing their knowledge pertaining to this very small student group and building systems to better support them at the school. The school leaders expressed their commitment to building their own knowledge and the school's systems regarding ELs/MLs and learning more about best practices, initiatives, and grant opportunities. Through the review of Highville's EL/ML materials it was determined that written procedures in the following areas were required: Home Language Survey, Parent Notification Letter, Exit Procedure Letter, develop an EL/ML assessment calendar, and create an electronic filing for the EL/ML procedures.

- **Indicator 4.4:** Highville 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 Highville’s staff file of March 15, 2024, reported 60.6 percent of staff are 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 33 staff members requiring certification, 20.0 staff members, or 60.6 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, 13 staff members, or 39.4 percent, are not properly certified: 9 who have no active certificate on file, 1 serving a grade that does not match a valid endorsement, and 3 serving in assignments that do not match a valid endorsement.

Highville is in compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program, and the Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) program.

- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against Highville 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.

| | |
|---|---|
| Prepared by: | Reviewed by: |
| Robert E. Kelly Charter School Program Manager | Irene E. Parisi Chief Academic Officer |

HIGHVILLE CHARTER SCHOOL DATA TABLES

| Table 1: 2022-23 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information | |
|--|-------|
| Grades served: | PK-12 |
| Total enrollment: | 504 |
| Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals: | 72.2 |
| Percentage of students with disabilities: | 8.7 |
| Percentage of students identified as English Learners: | * |
| Percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students: | * |
| Percentage of Asian students: | N/A |
| Percentage of Black or African American students: | 83.9 |
| Percentage of Hispanic or Latino students: | 13.7 |
| Percentage of Two or More Races: | 1.6 |
| Percentage of White students: | * |

*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 |
| Accountability Index | 72.7 | 64.7 | 74.2 | 51.4 | 60.9 | 69.7 | 47.8 | 57.6 | 69.3 |
| ELA-All Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | 59.0 | 57.8 | 67.7 | 50.3 | 51.3 | 64.2 | 50.3 | 50.8 | 63.9 |
| Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%) | 55.4 | 55.2 | 59.9 | 53.5 | 58.7 | 60.4 | 52.0 | 52.1 | 57.2 |
| Math-All Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | 50.4 | 50.6 | 63.1 | 42.4 | 42.0 | 58.6 | 42.9 | 43.0 | 59.7 |
| Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%) | 55.0 | 53.6 | 62.5 | 52.4 | 59.7 | 65.2 | 46.6 | 52.9 | 61.8 |
| Graduation-All Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%) | * | 80.9 | 88.5 | * | 75.8 | 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 |
| ELA-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | 57.5 | 54.9 | 58.1 | 48.0 | 48.2 | 54.2 | 48.6 | 47.8 | 54.1 |
| Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%) | 56.6 | 53.6 | 55.1 | 53.4 | 57.1 | 56.2 | 49.7 | 50.6 | 52.5 |
| Math-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | 48.9 | 47.8 | 52.7 | 40.6 | 39.0 | 47.7 | 40.8 | 40.0 | 48.9 |
| Academic Growth Average Percentage of Target Achieved (Target 100%) | 55.1 | 52.4 | 55.2 | 52.5 | 58.8 | 59.1 | 42.6 | 51.7 | 55.5 |
| Graduation-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%) | * | 83.6 | 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 ¹ | | | 2021-2022 | | | 2022-2023 | | |
| Indicator | School | Host District | State | School | Host District | State | School | Host District | State |
| Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%) | 13.7 | 21.1 | 12.2 | 48.9 | 58.1 | 23.7 | 28.1 | 36.6 | 20.0 |
| Suspension Rate (%) | 11.9 | 4.6 | 4.9 | N/A | 6.1 | 6.5 | 9.4 | 7.7 | 7.0 |
| Discipline Tier | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| Table 5: Student Wait List and Mobility Information | | | | |
|---|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Performance Metric: | | 2021-2022 | 2022-2023 | 2023-2024 |
| Waiting number: | | 185 | 168 | 147 |
| Number of enrolled students who left during the school year: | | 18 | 29 | N/A |
| Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school: | | 60 | 75 | N/A |

¹ 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.



WOODBIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

40 Beecher Road – South
Woodbridge, Connecticut 06525

Vonda J. Tencza – Superintendent

vtencza@woodbridgeps.org

November 15, 2023

Mr. Robert Kelly
Charter School Program Manager
Connecticut State Department of Education
P.O. Box 2219
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Kelly:

I am responding to the request soliciting comments on the charter application of the Highville Charter School. I know of no reason nor can I provide any comments, which reflect poorly on the Highville Charter School. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Vonda J. Tencza
Superintendent