

VII.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:

April 6, 2022

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Explorations Charter School from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024, subject to the Commissioner's April 6, 2022, 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 April, Two Thousand Twenty-Two.

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

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

TO: State Board of Education

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

DATE: April 6, 2022

SUBJECT: Renewal of State Charter – Explorations Charter School, Winsted

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

Explorations Charter School (Explorations) opened in the fall of 1997. The CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2020-21 reported 86 students in Grades 9-12 with 62.8 percent residing in Torrington (the majority sending district), 18.6 percent from Winchester (the host district), and the remaining 18.6 percent of students coming from 12 area towns. Explorations has a maximum approved student enrollment of 92 seats serving Grades 9-12 in fiscal year 2022-23. Table 1, on page 15, of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides 2020-21 student enrollment and demographic data. Seventy-four point four percent of Explorations' students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 38.4 percent of the students receive special education services. The mission of Explorations is to "meet the unique educational, social, and emotional needs of our diverse student population in a safe, nurturing, and non-traditional environment."

Charter Renewal Process

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

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

Renewal Site Visit: On January 19, 2022, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at Explorations. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe Explorations' programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school's charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through the onsite visit observations, document reviews, interviews, and focus groups. The team spoke with board members, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. The team used this process to ensure that the school is functioning in compliance with the law and the school's mission. The team verified the responses detailed in the renewal application regarding compliance with the law and the CSDE's performance framework and accountability plan.

Invitation for Written Comment: The CSDE solicited written comments on the renewal of Explorations from the Superintendent of Winchester Public Schools and from contiguous school districts: Barkhamsted, Colebrook, Litchfield, New Hartford, Norfolk and Torrington. The CSDE received a letter of support of Explorations from Melony M. Brady-Shanley, Superintendent, Winchester Public Schools (see Attachment A).

Public Hearing: Donald Harris, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on February 9, 2022, in the city of Winsted, and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of Explorations and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the Explorations community, including, family members, alums, school staff, community members and Melony M. Brady-Shanley, Superintendent, Winchester Public Schools. Nineteen people attended the public hearing. Fourteen 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 Explorations' performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights school strengths and areas for continued growth.

When viewing and interpreting the data starting in 2019, it is important to note the following considerations:

- schools were fully remote from mid-March to mid-June 2020;
- in March 2020, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from both administering state academic assessments in 2019-20 and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System;
- in 2020-21, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control;
- in 2020-21, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct;
- in-person school changed including the emergence of new instructional approaches such as concurrent teaching;
- students and educators expressed increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and trauma;
- in 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; 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.

As Explorations is a high school serving Grades 9-12, per state requirement the school administers the Connecticut SAT School Day (SAT) to students in Grade 11. Unlike the Smarter Balanced assessments where students are assessed on the same assessment in grades 3-8 and growth of the same student can be measured properly from one grade to the next, the SAT is administered only once in Grade 11, so a "matched cohort growth" is not available. Further, as a small high school with less than twenty students in each learning model, scores for the school are not reportable. Due to these limitations, the CSDE is unable to provide quantitative state assessment data for Explorations.

Strengths Include

- Explorations' 2018-19 and 2019-20 Discipline Tier Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data has remained at Tier one, the highest designation achieved by districts with low suspension rates and low racial/ethnic disparities in discipline data compared to all other districts.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in Explorations' last three certified financial audits.
- The school demonstrates strong community support as evidenced by testimony provided by individuals at the public hearing and interviews with parents and students during the site visit.
- School website and Governing Board documents demonstrate that the Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public.
- A review of Explorations' state certified staff file and employee roster determined all staff are compliant with teacher certification. Further, the review determined Explorations is in compliance with Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) and Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM).

Areas for Continued Growth

- During the 2016-21 fiscal years, Explorations utilized funds through the federal School Improvement Grant to revise and update curricula focused on increasing rigor, higher order questioning, and student-centered lessons. The CSDE renewal site visit determined that while the curricula work is underway, the revisions and unit planning are not complete.
- A review of the school's suspension rate of 12.5 percent in 2018-19 exceeds Torrington's 7.8 percent by 4.7 percentage points and the state's 6.7 percent by 5.8 percentage points. It is important the school continue to refine its restorative discipline model to minimize behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions, including teaching and reteaching of expected behaviors, isolating the root causes of behavioral issues, identifying interventions to target root causes and engaging school stakeholders, particularly parents, teachers and administrators to actively engage in efforts that promote and incentives student behavior that is respectful and conducive to learning.
- A review of chronic absenteeism at the school is of concern due to its pervasiveness. The school was cited for this issue in its last two preceding renewals dated May 6, 2015, and May 2, 2018. As a condition of the two preceding renewals, the school was required to develop and implement a corrective action plan to target and address chronic absenteeism. The chronic absenteeism rate has averaged 30.7 percent over the last seven years (2014-15 through 2020-21). A review of the school's chronic absenteeism in 2018-19 of 29.4 percent, 2019-20 of 32.1 percent and 2020-21 of 32.5 percent have trended up and exceeded Torrington and the state over the three-year period. In the 2020-21 school year, students attended school in-person to varying degrees; some learned fully/mostly remotely for the entire school year. The school must refine efforts to develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance going forward.
- A review of the school's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate noted a significant drop from 83.9 percent in 2018-19 to 54.8 percent in 2019-20. During the site visit, an administrator was questioned about the cause of the drop. The response was nine seniors did not acquire the required number of credits to graduate in 2019-20. Eight of the nine students returned and completed the work necessary to graduate in 2020-21.

- A review of Explorations' Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) determined the APPM requires policy amendments in the areas of budget development, tracking asset inventory, special education billing, payroll adjustments, travel approval and reimbursements, Board approval of annual audit findings, purchasing and contract authorization thresholds and signatories, handling and depositing of cash, and monthly bank and credit card reconciliations. School administration in cooperation with its Governing Board are preparing the required policy amendments.
- While a review of the school website determined that the Governing Board meeting minutes are posted, the meeting minutes for subcommittees of the Governing Board are not posted and must be posted. School administration, in cooperation with the Governing Board, are working together to post the meeting minutes of Governing Board subcommittees.
- A review of the school's special education program determined it does not meet the requirements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The school must ensure LRE is planned individually by the Planning Placement Team (PPT) for each student. The school must ensure that students are only pulled from general education when the PPT determines that the student will not be able to make effective progress in general education with appropriate supports and services. The school is working with members of the Bureau of Special Education to ensure that the requirements of LRE are provided.

Charter Renewal Recommendation

Explorations is a charter school that serves a specific need in the community by serving to re-engage students who are at high risk of dropping out and have struggled behaviorally and academically in a traditional school setting. On May 2, 2018, Explorations received a three-year charter renewal. Conditions stated in the 2018 renewal required Explorations to develop corrective action plans to minimize behavioral incidents resulting in student suspensions, address chronic absenteeism, and include measures to improve student academic achievement. As the data shows, suspension rates at the school continue to outpace Torrington and the state. Chronic absenteeism continues to be a problem at the school. A review of the school's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate noted a significant drop from 83.9 percent in 2018-19 to 54.8 percent in 2019-20. In addition, during the 2016-21 fiscal years, Explorations utilized funds through the federal School Improvement Grant to revise and update curricula focused on increasing rigor, higher order questioning, and student-centered lessons. The CSDE site visit determined that while the curricula work is underway, the revisions and unit planning are not complete. Acknowledging that Explorations' performance indicators are not without weakness and the school has additional curricula improvements to complete, the CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school's charter for a period of two years, subject to the following conditions:

1. By May 9, 2022, Explorations shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner. The corrective action plan must include strategies and action steps to improve student academic achievement. Additionally, Explorations 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 a 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. Explorations shall submit to the CSDE, on a bi-monthly basis, beginning in October 2022, a report monitoring its year-to-date progress of improving student academic achievement. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE's Turnaround Office. Explorations shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner's acceptance of the plan.

2. By May 9, 2022, Explorations shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner. The corrective action plan must target and address chronic absenteeism by: (a) isolating the root causes of chronic absenteeism; (b) identifying interventions to target root causes; and (c) monitoring interventions and applying midcourse corrections, as necessary. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE's Turnaround Office. Explorations shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner's acceptance of the plan. The CSDE will review Explorations year-to-date number of student chronic absenteeism on EdSight at the year-end of June 30, 2022. Additionally, the CSDE will develop with Explorations, a bi-monthly review of the school's chronic absenteeism rate beginning in October 2022.
3. This spring and summer 2022, the CSDE Academic Office and Turnaround Office will meet with representatives of Explorations to review school curricula and unit plans. Further technical assistance will be developed and provided to ensure Exploration's curricula revision work with a focus on increased rigor, higher order questioning, and student-centered lessons are completed and in place for the 2022-23 school year.
4. In the spring of 2023, Explorations 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, chronic absenteeism, and provide an overview of the curricula development and implementation school wide.

The CSDE will notify Explorations of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on April 6, 2022. The school will be advised of relevant technical assistance opportunities designed to improve its educational program. The CSDE will conduct follow-up visits to ensure Explorations is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

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

Reviewed by: Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director
Turnaround Office

Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner

CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | 2022

| Charter School Information: | | | |
|---|---|------------|-----------------|
| Charter School Name: | Explorations Charter School | | |
| School Director: | Jill Johnson | | |
| School Board Chairperson: | Ginni Block | | |
| Location (City/Town): | Winsted | | |
| 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 schools falls below performance expectations with significant concerns noted, which require immediate attention and intervention. | | |
| Standard 1: School Performance Indicators | | Points/Max | % Points Earned |
| Accountability Index: | | 495.0/850 | 58.2 |
| Notes and Evidence: | | | |
| Explorations Charter School (Explorations) 2018-19 Accountability Index of 58.2, is 16 percentage points below the state school Accountability Index of 74.2 percent. Schools that meet Standard 1: are schools earning an accountability index from 85 to 100 (Category 1), schools earning an accountability index from 70 to 84.9 percent, (Category 2) and schools earning an accountability index of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School (Category 3). Explorations Accountability Index score of 58.2 percent places its performance in Category 3, which earns a does not meet for Standard 1. Explorations 2018-19 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page. | | | |

Next Generation Accountability, 2018-19 – Explorations Charter School (Grades: 9-12)
School Category 3



| Indicator | Index/Rate | Target | Points Earned | Max Points | % Points Earned | State Average % Points Earned |
|--|------------|--------|---------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students | 48.8 | 75 | 97.5 | 150 | 65.0 | 90.2 |
| 1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students | . | 75 | . | . | . | 77.5 |
| 1c. Math Performance Index - All Students | 39.2 | 75 | 78.3 | 150 | 52.2 | 84.1 |
| 1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students | . | 75 | . | . | . | 70.2 |
| 1e. Science Performance Index - All Students | 53.2 | 75 | 70.9 | 100 | 70.9 | 85.0 |
| 1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students | . | 75 | . | . | . | 72.2 |
| 2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students | . | 100% | . | . | . | 59.9 |
| 2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students | . | 100% | . | . | . | 55.1 |
| 2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students | . | 100% | . | . | . | 62.5 |
| 2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students | . | 100% | . | . | . | 55.2 |
| 2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy | . | 100% | . | . | . | 60.0 |
| 2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral | . | 100% | . | . | . | 52.1 |
| 4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students | 29.4% | <=5% | 1.2 | 50 | 2.4 | 78.3 |
| 4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students | 30.2% | <=5% | 0.0 | 50 | 0.0 | 55.7 |
| 5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses | 77.1% | 75% | 50.0 | 50 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| 6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams | 12.5% | 75% | 8.3 | 50 | 16.7 | 56.7 |
| 7. On-track to High School Graduation | . | 94% | . | . | . | 93.6 |
| 8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2018 Cohort) | 82.1% | 94% | 87.4 | 100 | 87.4 | 93.9 |
| 9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2016 Cohort) | . | 94% | . | . | . | 88.6 |
| 10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2018) | 45.8% | 75% | 61.1 | 100 | 61.1 | 94.5 |
| 11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = .) | . | 75% | . | . | . | 70.6 |
| 12. Arts Access | 48.2% | 60% | 40.2 | 50 | 80.4 | 86.5 |
| Accountability Index | . | . | 495.0 | 850 | 58.2 | 74.2 |

Gap Indicators

| Indicator | Non-High Needs Rate | High Needs Rate | Size of Gap | State Gap Mean +1 Stdev | Is Gap an Outlier? |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| ELA Performance Index Gap | . | . | . | 15.3 | |
| Math Performance Index Gap | . | . | . | 17.4 | |
| Science Performance Index Gap | . | . | . | 16.3 | |
| Graduation Rate Gap (2016 Cohort) | . | . | . | 8.0 | |

If the Non-High Needs Rate exceeds the ultimate target (75 for Performance Index and 94% for Graduation Rate), the ultimate target is used for gap calculations.

If the size of the gap exceeds the state mean gap plus one standard deviation, the gap is an outlier.

Assessment Participation Rates

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

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 type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" 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 Explorations' last three certified financial audits and uncovered no significant findings, conditions, or internal control weakness. • Indicator 2.2: The CSDE site visit staff reviewed Explorations' last certified financial audit, Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM), Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) and budgets, and interviewed the school Executive Director, Principal, Business Office Manager, and governing board members. Staff from the CSDE's Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM and BPPM contains the standard sections of such documents. However, the APPM requires some amendments including budget development process, school asset inventory, special education billing process, payroll adjustments, travel pre-approval and reimbursement, Board approval of annual audit findings, purchasing and contract authorization thresholds and signatories, handling of cash within school to Business Office and cash deposits, and bank and credit card reconciliations. The reviewers determined Explorations completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets. School administration, in cooperation with its Governing Board, are preparing the required policy amendments. • Indicator 2.3: Staff from the CSDE's Office of Internal Audit reviewed Explorations' latest certified financial audit and determined Explorations' debt to asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities) and total margin (net income/total revenue) 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 Explorations' school policies regarding conflict of interest and nepotism were found to be in compliance with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. Explorations' policies and procedures regarding background checks of staff and board members, open board meetings and board membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. A review of the school website determined the Governing Board meeting minutes are posted. However, the meeting minutes for subcommittees of the Governing Board must also be posted. A review of Explorations' Bylaws found them to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. School administration, in cooperation with the Governing Board, are working together to post the meeting minutes of Board subcommittees. • Indicator 2.5: As evidenced during the site visit, Explorations has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. The facility has been approved by the Winsted Fire Marshal and Building Department. The school has proof of property insurance. | |

| 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"> Indicator 3.1: A review of the CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2020-21 reported 86 students in Grades 9-12 (Explorations) with 62.8 percent residing in Torrington (the majority sending district), 18.6 percent from Winchester (the host district), and the remaining 18.6 percent of students coming from 12 area towns. A review of the school's student enrollment policy, interviews with school staff, board members, and parents determined all students are admitted through a blind lottery. Indicator 3.2: A review of Explorations waitlist information (Table 5, page 17) determined it has not placed anyone on its waitlist over the past three years and has enrolled all students that sought admittance into the school. Generally, the school has met or near met its enrollment cap each of the last three years. Indicator 3.3: A review of Explorations' 2020-21 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports 74.4 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students at Explorations is 38.4 percent. Explorations does not currently serve Multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). To better reflect the demographics of the surrounding community, the school must seek to enroll more students who are MLs/ELs. Indicator 3.4: Explorations 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, and written communication including translations in second languages, when necessary. Currently, parents report receiving regular reports from the school that detail student academics and behavior. Parents expressed support for what they perceive is a 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. Students explained during the student interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team, on the day of the site visit, that they are happy with the educational choice opportunity the school provides. Nineteen individuals attended the February 9, 2022, renewal public hearing, and 14 individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of its charter. No one spoke out against the renewal of the school's charter. Indicator 3.5: Explorations' 2018-19 and 2019-20 Discipline Tier Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data has remained at Tier one, the highest designation achieved by districts with low suspension rates and low racial/ethnic disparities in discipline data compared to all other districts. A review of the school's suspension rate in comparison to Torrington and the state in the pre-pandemic year 2018-19 of 12.5 percent exceed the majority sending district Torrington of 7.8 percent by 4.7 percentage points and the state rate of 6.7 percent by 5.8 percentage points. It is important the school continues to refine its restorative discipline model to minimize behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions, including teaching and reteaching of expected behaviors, isolating the root causes of behavioral issues, identifying interventions to target root causes and engaging school stakeholders, particularly parents, teachers and administrators to actively engage in efforts that promote and incentives behavior that is proper and respectful and conducive to learning. | |

- A review of chronic absenteeism at the school is of concern due to its pervasiveness. The school was cited for this issue as part of its last renewal on May 2, 2018. As a condition of that renewal the school was required to develop and implement a corrective action plan to target and address chronic absenteeism. The chronic absenteeism rate has averaged 30.7 percent over the last seven years (2014-15 through 2020-21). A review of the school's chronic absenteeism in 2018-19 of 29.4 percent, 2019-20 of 32.1 percent, and 2020-21 of 32.5 percent have trended up and exceeded Torrington and the state over the three-year period. In the 2020-21 school year, students attended school in-person to varying degrees; some learned fully/mostly remotely for the entire school year. The school must refine efforts to develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance going forward.

| 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM |
| 4.4. Rights of Students | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM |
| 4.5. Teacher/Staff Credentials, TEAM and EESP | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM |
| 4.6. Employee Rights | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM |
| Notes and Evidence: | |
| <p>• Indicator 4.1: The school website and Governing Board documents demonstrate that Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The Governing Board meeting schedule for the year and meeting agendas are posted on the school's website. Education records and testing data are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room.</p> <p>Indicator 4.2: A review of Explorations 2020-21 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports the percentage of special education students at the school is 38.4 percent. The school directly employs two special education teachers and a social worker. Planning Placement Team (PPT) meetings are scheduled and held by the school district in which the student resides in collaboration with Explorations. Invitations are sent to Parents/Guardians, students (as appropriate), and required PPT members to participate in the meetings.</p> <p>Interviews with the special education teachers determined that the provision of special education and related services are provided in resource rooms. This does not meet the requirements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). LRE should be planned individually by the PPT for each student. Special education and related services should be provided in the general education environment as an initial consideration. Students should only be pulled from general education when the PPT determines that the student will not be able to make effective progress in general education with appropriate supports and services. The PPT should always consider what supports and services a student requires to access the general education curriculum and these services should be provided in the regular education classroom whenever appropriate for the individual child.</p> <p>The prevalence rate for special education at Explorations is more than double the state average. Staffing supports need to be available to support student needs. The number of special education teachers must be sufficient to meet all student's needs in what the PPT determines is their LRE.</p> <p>The related services including speech and language, physical and occupational therapy services are provided by the district of residence as required. A formal system to track the provision of related services, missed services, and plans to make up missed services must be implemented.</p> <p>Student education files are kept in a secure room. However, all files, as official records, must have individual sign-in access sheets and teacher notes should be kept separately.</p> <p>The school must have a system to ensure that general education teachers have access to and are reviewing IEPs of the students in their classes. General education teachers must, at minimum, review accommodations, modifications and goals, and objectives in any area of development that relates to their classroom. Common planning time with special education and general education teachers to allow planning for specialized instruction, review accommodations and modifications, and instructional strategies is necessary.</p> | |

The CSDE has recommended school administration arrange for the provision of professional development and technical assistance to support increased provision of specialized instruction and related services within the general education classroom and restraint and seclusion training. As the school enrolls 7 students that have the educational classification of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) there should be access to professionals with knowledge of ASD and effective supports (e.g., Board Certified Behavior Analyst).

The school must ensure LRE is planned individually by the PPT for each student. The school must ensure that students are only pulled from general education when the PPT determines that the student will not be able to make effective progress in general education with appropriate supports and services. The CSDE will review LRE at the school going forward to ensure it is maintained. Further, the CSDE and the school administration will ensure the development of systems to track the provision of related services, student file access logs, teacher access to the IEP information of students, and the common planning time with the special education and the general education teachers, to ensure student needs are met.

- **Indicator 4.3:** Explorations does not currently serve Multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs) at the school. The school is commended for providing the ML/EL forms, procedures and assessments in its Charter Renewal Application materials in preparation for ML/EL students it may enroll. The school is currently compliant regarding ML/EL students.

The following policy amendments are necessary in anticipation of the need to serve such students in the future.

- If MLs/ELs enroll from another CT district, it is not necessary to re-administer the Home Language Survey (HLS). The initial HLS should be included in the student's cumulative file and/or the student's status as an ML/EL will be available in EdSight Secure.
- Ensure that all potential MLs/ELs that enter at the beginning of the school year are screened to determine EL proficiency within 30 calendar days.
- Ensure that all potential MLs/ELs that enter during the school year are screened to determine EL proficiency within 15 calendar days.
- Ensure that parents/families/guardians are informed about a student's identification as an ML/EL and given the right to select language supports or decline services upon the student's identification as an ML/EL.
- Ensure that all MLs/ELs are annually administered the LAS Links English language proficiency assessment.
- **Indicator 4.4:** Explorations' student rights policies and procedures include admissions, handling of student information, due process protections, and state nondiscrimination laws. Interviews with parents and staff at the school supported the proper implementation and use of the policies.
- **Indicator 4.5:** Staff from the CSDE, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification reviewed the state certified staff file and the school's employee roster in early February 2022, and determined 100 percent of staff are compliant with teacher certification. Further, the review determined Explorations is in compliance with Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP) and Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM).
- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against Explorations determined that no government agency alleged the violation of any law by the school or undertaken any investigation of any violation of law by the school.

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

EXPLORATIONS CHARTER SCHOOL DATA

| Table 1: 2020-21 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information | |
|--|------|
| Grades served: | 9-12 |
| Total enrollment: | 86 |
| Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals: | 74.4 |
| Percentage of special education students: | 38.4 |
| Percentage of students with limited English proficiency: | 0 |
| Percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students: | 0 |
| Percentage of Asian students: | 0 |
| Percentage of Black students: | * |
| Percentage of Hispanic students: | 15.1 |
| Percentage of Two or More Races: | * |
| Percentage of Caucasian students: | 79.1 |

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

| Table 2: Student Waitlist and Mobility Information | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Performance Metric: | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022 |
| Waitlist number: | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Number of enrolled students who left during the school year: | 10 | 11 | 14 |
| Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school: | 0 | 1 | 0 |

| Indicator | | Torrington | | | Torrington | | | Torrington | | | Torrington | |
|--|--|------------|--|--|------------|--|--|------------|--|--|------------|--|
| Accountability Index % | | 65.9 | | | 68.7 | | | 68.0 | | | N/A | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | | 62.5 | | | 64.1 | | | 62.4 | | | N/A | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | | 54.4 | | | 56.4 | | | 55.8 | | | N/A | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%) | | 70.4 | | | 82.8 | | | 81.5 | | | 80.1 | |

| Table 4: School Performance-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-------|-----------|------------|-------|-----------|------------|-------|
| | 2016-2017 | | | 2017-2018 | | | 2018-2019 | | |
| Indicator | School | Torrington | State | School | Torrington | State | School | Torrington | State |
| ELA-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | * | 58.2 | 55.9 | * | 60.7 | 57.5 | * | 58.6 | 58.1 |
| Math-High Needs Students | | | | | | | | | |
| Performance Index (Target 75) | * | 50.0 | 50.5 | * | 53.1 | 52.0 | * | 52.1 | 52.7 |

| Table 5: School Culture and Climate | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|------------------------|------------|-------|------------------------|------------|-------|
| | 2018-2019 | | | 2019-2020 ¹ | | | 2020-2021 ² | | |
| Indicator | School | Torrington | State | School | Torrington | State | School | Torrington | State |
| Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%) | 29.4% | 11.5% | 10.4% | 32.1% | 14.7% | 12.2% | 32.5% | 32.1% | 19.0% |
| Suspension Rate (%) | 12.5% | 7.8% | 6.7% | 16.3% | 6.0% | 4.9% | * | 1.6% | 1.4% |
| Discipline Tier | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

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

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



Winchester Public Schools

338 Main Street, P.O. Box 648 Winsted, CT 06098
Telephone: 860-379-0706; Fax: 860-738-0638
Melony M. Brady-Shanley – Superintendent of Schools

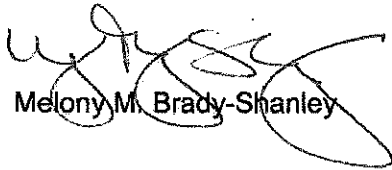
October 13, 2021

Dear Mrs. Lamenzo,

On behalf of the Winchester Public Schools, we wish to extend our support of the Explorations Charter School in Winsted, CT. Explorations has proven to be a willing and able co-partner in the education of the children of Winchester. Currently, our two organizations are routinely communicating, engaging on various educational projects, and working collaboratively to support the specific needs of selected students.

We look forward to a long and fruitful relationship with Explorations Charter School. If you should have any further questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Melony M. Brady-Shanley