

# IX.C.

## CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Hartford

**TO BE PROPOSED:**  
September 4, 2019

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes and the Charter Agreement, accepts the Trailblazers Academy's surrender of the Charter, closeout procedures, and transition plan for the 2019-20 school year, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of \_\_\_\_\_ this fourth day of September, Two Thousand Nineteen.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** September 4, 2019

**SUBJECT:** Trailblazers Academy Surrender of Charter and Acceptance of Closeout Procedures

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

Trailblazers Academy Inc. (Trailblazers) is a state charter middle school located in Stamford. The school had 126 students enrolled in grades 6, 7 and 8 at the end of the 2018-19 academic year. Due to lack of financial viability, Trailblazers seeks to suspend operations and surrender the charter. This pending action is for the State Board of Education (SBE) to accept the surrender of Trailblazers' charter, and approve the proposed closeout procedures and transition plan.

**History/Background**

The SBE initially granted the Trailblazers charter in 1999, and the school has been in continuous operation ever since. Trailblazers is managed under a Charter Management Organization (CMO) contract with Domus Kids, Inc. (Domus), a non-profit organization. The SBE last renewed Trailblazers' charter in 2017, resulting in a four-year charter renewal through June 30, 2021. See Exhibit A, Charter Agreement, and Exhibit B, the May 2017 SBE resolution approving the Trailblazers Academy charter. Although schools typically continue operation through the approval period, the Charter Agreement reached between Trailblazers Academy and the SBE authorizes termination and dissolution of the charter prior to the end of the renewal period.

On July 9, 2019, representatives of Trailblazers notified the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE or Department) that Trailblazers intended to discontinue operations imminently, and thus the school would be closed for the upcoming 2019-2020 academic year. Despite CSDE's efforts to persuade Trailblazers leadership to maintain operations for a longer period of time, the Trailblazers governing board voted on July 17, 2019 to cease operations and terminate Trailblazers' Charter Agreement with the SBE, and official written notice was provided to the CSDE thereafter.

Since receiving notice of Trailblazers' intent to close, CSDE staff has collaborated with Trailblazers leadership to ensure all students were promptly enrolled in new schools for the upcoming academic year, and to remind staff of Trailblazers ongoing obligations related to student records, notification of parents and districts, finances, and other transitional requirements and activities.

With CSDE oversight, Trailblazers has worked directly with students' families through individualized meetings, to collect necessary data, share information, and ultimately enroll Trailblazers students in new schools. In addition, the CSDE Turnaround Office (Turnaround) has been in regular contact with Dr. Tamu Lucero, Stamford Superintendent of Schools, to ensure that incoming displaced Trailblazers students and families are supported by Stamford Public Schools – the home district to 112 of Trailblazers' 126 students.

The Turnaround Office has been working with representatives of Trailblazers, Domus and Stamford Public Schools to ensure that all students affected by the closing of Trailblazers Academy are transferred to new schools. With support from the Performance Office, Turnaround has used the Public School Information System (PSIS) to identify and monitor the enrollment status of Trailblazers students. Subsequent to an initial July 18, 2019 planning session with Turnaround, Trailblazers and Domus, weekly teleconferences have been conducted to monitor the ongoing enrollment progress. The CSDE Turnaround Office will continue to coordinate these weekly telephone calls until the enrollment process is complete.

### **Recommendation and Justification**

It is recommended that the SBE accept the voluntary surrender of the Trailblazers Academy charter, and authorize the Commissioner and CSDE to continue working with Trailblazers and Domus to implement all necessary close-out procedures, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that all students affected by the Trailblazers Academy closing are successfully placed in suitable area schools, and there are no outstanding financial issues.

### **Follow-up Activity**

The CSDE Turnaround Office will continue to conduct weekly telephone calls with Trailblazers and Domus until the enrollment process has been successfully completed for all students that were displaced by the Trailblazers Academy closure.

The CSDE will continue to work with Trailblazers staff on financial issues, and to ensure Trailblazers' assets are properly inventoried so the State can reclaim any funds to which it may be entitled following Trailblazers' cessation of operations.

Jessa Y. Mirtle, Director  
Division of Legal and Governmental Affairs

Lisa Lamenzo  
Bureau Chief, Turnaround Office

Matthew Venhorst, Attorney  
Division of Legal and Governmental Affairs

Robert Kelly  
Charter School Program Manager

# EXHIBIT A

## CHARTER OF TRAILBLAZERS ACADEMY

WHEREAS, this agreement is the Charter granted by the Connecticut State Board of Education (the "CSBE") to the Governing Council of **Trailblazers Academy, Inc.** (Trailblazers) (the "Charter Board") pursuant to the CSBE's authority to award charters under the Connecticut General Statutes;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66aa(6), this Charter is a contract made by and between the CSBE and the Charter Board (each a "Party," collectively, the "Parties");

WHEREAS, on April 7, 1999, the CSBE granted to the Charter Board a state charter to operate Trailblazers (the "School"), an independent and autonomous public state charter school in Stamford, Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, the CSBE has, since its initial authorization of the School, renewed the School's charter; and

WHEREAS, the School's charter would, if not again renewed, expire on June 30, 2017; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66bb(g), the CSBE accepted the Charter Board's application for renewal of the charter (the "Renewal Application") on September 2, 2016; and

WHEREAS, on **May 3, 2017**, the CSBE approved the renewal of the charter for a period of four (4) years from **July 1, 2017** through **June 30, 2021**, subject to the conditions noted in the May 3, 2017 memorandum to the CSBE from the Commissioner of Education ("Commissioner"), a copy of which is appended to this Charter as Appendix A (the "Commissioner's Memorandum").

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing, and in consideration of funding of the School by the State of Connecticut in accordance with applicable provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes concerning funding of charter schools, the CSBE and the Charter Board agree as follows:

- I. **CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE SCHOOL.** The Charter Board shall operate the School at its existing location in Stamford, Connecticut, to wit, 83 Lockwood Avenue, for grades 6-8, and shall do so in accordance with the representations, commitments, standards, and undertakings set forth in the Renewal Application, all performance and compliance requirements set forth in the Commissioner's Memorandum or as otherwise communicated to the Charter Board by the CSBE or the Connecticut State Department of Education (the "CSDE"), and any representations, commitments, standards, and undertakings otherwise communicated to the CSBE or CSDE. A copy of the Renewal Application is appended to this Charter as Appendix B. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing:

- A. Design Elements. The Charter Board shall implement and maintain the essential design elements of the School's educational program, as set forth in the Renewal Application and other communications to the CSBE and as subject to modification with the CSBE's prior written approval.
- B. Curriculum. The Charter Board shall implement the curricula described in the Renewal Application and other communications to the CSBE, supplemented with such other curricula, which may be helpful to the School's academic progress to the extent that such curricula meet or exceed the standards set forth by the CSBE or CSDE. The Charter Board may, without seeking CSBE approval, make reasonable modifications to its approved curriculum to meet its educational goals and student achievement standards. Any modifications, either individually or cumulatively, that are of such a nature or degree as to materially change the essential design elements will require approval from the CSBE and an amendment to this Charter.
- C. Student Assessment. The Charter Board shall have all students enrolled in the School participate in all testing programs required by the State of Connecticut.
- D. Performance Framework & Accountability. The Charter Board shall cause the School to perform in accordance with the charter performance framework established by the CSBE, including any and all performance standards and accountability processes and procedures, as may be modified from time to time.

## II. COMPLIANCE

- A. The Charter Board shall at all times operate the School in accordance with all provisions of law pertaining to the operation of a Charter School, including, without limiting the foregoing, all provisions of law pertaining to the operation of a public school, as set forth in the Connecticut General Statutes and Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and CSBE policies relating to the operation of a charter school. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing:
  - 1. Staff Eligibility. The Charter Board shall employ teachers and other staff that possess all applicable qualifications and certifications as required for charter school staff by state or federal law.
  - 2. Staff Training. The Charter Board shall ensure that school staff completes all training required by state or federal law, as applicable.
- B. The Charter Board shall cause the School to comply with all terms of the Renewal of its Charter, as set forth in the Commissioner's Memorandum, including, without limitation, the conditions to which the renewal of the Charter is subject.

III. GOVERNANCE: The Charter Board shall govern the School in a manner that is consistent with the terms of this Charter and applicable law. The Charter Board shall have final authority and responsibility for the academic, financial, and organizational performance of the School, the fulfillment of this Charter, and approval of the School's budgets. The Charter Board shall also have the authority to implement, and shall be responsible for, policy and operational decisions of the School.

- IV. **BREACH, TERMINATION, AND DISSOLUTION:** The grounds and procedures for breach, probation, non-renewal, revocation and termination of this Charter and dissolution of the School shall be in accordance with this Charter and applicable state law.
- A. Status of Charter. In accordance with applicable provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes, the CSBE may revoke a charter and, upon application, may renew or decline to renew a charter. The Commissioner may place the School on probation as provided in the Connecticut General Statutes.
  - B. Remedies. The CSBE may impose other appropriate remedies for breach including, but not limited to, revocation of waiver(s) and withholding of funds.
  - C. Termination by the Charter Board. Should the Charter Board choose to terminate this Charter before the end of the Charter term set forth in Section VII below, it may do so in consultation with the CSBE and upon written notice of its intent to terminate such Charter to the CSBE at least sixty (60) days prior to the commencement of the dissolution process, as provided in subsection D of this section.
  - D. Dissolution. Upon termination of this Charter for any reason by the CSBE, upon notice of termination of the Charter by the Charter Board, upon expiration of this Charter, or prior to any action or decision by the Charter Board to cease operations of or otherwise dissolve the school, the Charter Board shall, in consultation with the CSBE, implement close-out procedures acceptable to the CSBE to ensure an organized and timely dissolution of the school.

V. **NOTICES**

- A. Any notice required or permitted between the Parties will be in writing and will be effective upon personal delivery or three days after mailing when sent by certified mail, postage prepaid, addressed as provided below.

<p>B. To the CSBE:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Robert Kelly          State of Connecticut Department of Education          Turnaround Office          450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 602          Hartford, CT 06103          Tel: (860) 713-6574          Email: robert.kelly@ct.gov</p>	<p>C. To the Charter Board:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Trailblazers Academy          83 Lockwood Ave.          Stamford, CT 06902          Tel: 203-977-5690          Email: steve.baker@cushwake.com</p>
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- D. Each Party shall notify the other of any change to the above contact information within a reasonable period of time.

VI. **ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** The Additional Terms and Conditions set forth in Appendix C are incorporated into this Charter as if fully set forth herein.

VII. **TERM OF CHARTER:** This Charter shall become effective upon the date a fully signed agreement is approved as to form by the Office of the Attorney General and shall continue until June 30, 2021 unless sooner terminated in accordance with the terms of this Agreement.

**[SIGNATURE PAGE FOLLOWS]**

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties have executed this Charter.

**TRAILBLAZERS ACADEMY, INC.**

Stephen F. Bawa 8-15-17  
Signature (Authorized Official) Date

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Kathy Demsey 10-4-17  
Signature (Authorized Official) Date

**CONNECTICUT ATTORNEY GENERAL (Approved as to form)**

Joseph Rubin 1/3/18  
Signature Date  
Joseph Rubin  
Associate Attorney General



## APPENDIX C

### Additional Terms and Conditions

#### I. INSURANCE

- A. Insurance. Subject to the additional requirements of Section II.E below, the Charter Board shall maintain adequate insurance necessary for the operation of the School, including but not limited to property insurance, general liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, unemployment compensation insurance, motor vehicle insurance, and errors and omissions insurance covering the School and its employees.
- B. If there is a change in the School's insurance coverage, the Charter Board shall provide the CSBE with certificates of insurance within thirty (30) days of such change in coverage.

#### II. INDEMNIFICATION

- A. The Charter Board shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless the State of Connecticut ("State") and its officers, representatives, agents, servants, employees, successors and assigns from and against any and all (1) claims arising, directly or indirectly, in connection with this Agreement, including the acts of commission or omission (collectively, the "Acts") of the School; and (2) liabilities, damages, losses, costs and expenses, including but not limited to, attorneys' and other professionals' fees, arising, directly or indirectly, in connection with claims, Acts or the Agreement. The Charter Board shall use counsel reasonably acceptable to the State in carrying out its obligations under this section. The Charter Board's obligations under this section to indemnify, defend and hold harmless against claims includes claims concerning confidentiality of any part of or all of the Charter Board's rights of any person or entity, copyrighted or uncopyrighted compositions, secret processes, patented or unpatented inventions, articles or appliances furnished or used in the performance.
- B. The Charter Board shall not be responsible for indemnifying or holding the State harmless from any liability arising due to the negligence of the State or any third party acting under the direct control or supervision of the State.
- C. The Charter Board shall reimburse the State for any and all damages to the real or personal property of the State caused by the acts of Charter Board. The State shall give Charter Board reasonable notice of any such claims.
- D. The Charter Board's duties under this section shall remain fully in effect and binding in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Agreement, without being lessened or compromised in any way, even where the Charter Board is alleged or is found to have merely contributed in part to the Acts giving rise to the claims and/or where the State is alleged or is found to have contributed to the Acts giving rise to the claims.
- E. The Charter Board shall carry and maintain at all times during the term of the Charter, and during the time that any provisions survive the term of the Charter, sufficient general liability insurance to satisfy its obligations under this Charter. The Charter Board shall cause the State to be named as an additional insured on the policy and shall provide (1) a certificate of insurance, (2) the declaration page and (3) the additional insured endorsement to the policy to the CSBE prior to the Effective Date of the Charter evidencing that the State is an additional insured. The Charter Board shall not begin performance until the delivery of these three documents to the CSBE. The State of Connecticut shall be entitled to recover under the insurance policy even if a body of competent jurisdiction determines that State is contributorily negligent.
- F. This section shall survive the termination of the Agreement and shall not be limited by reason of any insurance coverage.

- III. AUDIT AND INSPECTION OF PLANTS, PLACES OF BUSINESS AND RECORDS:
- A. The State and its agents, including, but not limited to, the Connecticut Auditors of Public Accounts, Attorney General, a State's Attorney, and their respective agents, may, at reasonable hours, inspect and examine all of the parts of the School's and each of its Contractors,' including a Charter Management Organization, plants and places of business which, in any way, are related to, or involved in, the performance of this Agreement.
  - B. The Charter Board shall maintain, and shall require each of its Contractors Parties' including CMO, if applicable, to maintain, accurate and complete records. The Charter Board shall make all of its and the Contractor Parties' including CMO, if applicable records available at all reasonable hours for audit and inspection by the State and its agents.
  - C. The State shall make all requests for any audit or inspection in writing and shall provide the Charter Board with at least twenty-four (24) hours' notice prior to the requested audit and inspection date. If the State suspects fraud or other abuse, or in the event of an emergency, the State is not obligated to provide any prior notice.
  - D. The Contractor will pay for all costs and expenses of any audit or inspection which reveals information that, in the sole determination of the State, is sufficient to constitute a breach by the Contractor under this Contract. The Contractor will remit full payment to the State for such audit or inspection no later than 30 days after receiving an invoice from the State. If the State does not receive payment within such time, the State may setoff the amount from any moneys which the State would otherwise be obligated to pay the Contractor in accordance with this Contract's setoff provision.
  - E. The Charter Board shall keep and preserve or cause to be kept and preserved all of its and records until three (3) years after the latter of (i) final payment under this Agreement, or (ii) the expiration or earlier termination of this Agreement, as the same may be modified for any reason. The State may request an audit or inspection at any time during this period. If any claim or audit is started before the expiration of this period, the Charter Board shall retain or cause to be retained all records until all claims or audit findings have been resolved.
  - F. The Charter Board shall cooperate fully with the State and its agents in connection with an audit or inspection. Following any audit or inspection, the State may conduct and the Charter Board shall cooperate with an exit conference.
  - G. The Charter Board shall incorporate this entire Section verbatim into any contract or other agreement that it enters into with all Contractor Parties.

#### IV. NONDISCRIMINATION

1. For purposes of this Section, the following terms are defined as follows:
  - “Commission” means the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities;
2. “Contract” and “contract” include any extension or modification of the Charter;
3. “Contractor” and “contractor” include any successors or assigns of the Charter Board;
4. “Gender identity or expression” means a person’s gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person’s physiology or assigned sex at birth, which gender-related identity can be shown by providing evidence including, but not limited to, medical history, care or treatment of the gender-related identity, consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held, part of a person’s core identity or not being asserted for an improper purpose.
5. “good faith” means that degree of diligence which a reasonable person would exercise in the performance of legal duties and obligations;
6. “good faith efforts” shall include, but not be limited to, those reasonable initial efforts necessary to comply with statutory or regulatory requirements and additional or substituted efforts when it is determined that such initial efforts will not be sufficient to comply with such requirements;
7. “marital status” means being single, married as recognized by the State of Connecticut, widowed, separated or divorced;
8. “mental disability” means one or more mental disorders, as defined in the most recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders", or a record of or regarding a person as having one or more such disorders;
9. “minority business enterprise” means any small contractor or supplier of materials fifty-one percent or more of the capital stock, if any, or assets of which is owned by a person or persons: (1) who are active in the daily affairs of the enterprise, (2) who have the power to direct the management and policies of the enterprise, and (3) who are members of a minority, as such term is defined in subsection (a) of Connecticut General Statutes § 32-9n; and
10. “public works contract” means any Agreement between any individual, firm or corporation and the State or any political subdivision of the State other than a municipality for construction, rehabilitation, conversion, extension, demolition or repair of a public building, highway or other changes or improvements in real property, or which is financed in whole or in part by the State, including, but not limited to, matching expenditures, grants, loans, insurance or guarantees.

For purposes of this Section, the terms “Contract” and “contract” do not include a contract where each contractor is (1) a political subdivision of the state, including, but not limited to, a municipality, (2) a quasi-public agency, as defined in Connecticut General Statutes § 1-120, (3) any other state, including but not limited to any federally recognized Indian tribal governments, as defined in Connecticut General Statutes § 1-267, (4) the federal government, (5) a foreign government, or (6) an agency of a subdivision, agency, state or government described in the immediately preceding enumerated items (1), (2), (3), (4) or (5).

- A. The Contractor agrees and warrants that in the performance of the Contract such Contractor will not discriminate or permit discrimination against any person or group of persons on the grounds of race, color, religious creed, age, marital status, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender identity or expression, intellectual disability, mental disability or physical disability, including, but not limited to, blindness, unless it is shown by such Contractor that such disability prevents performance of the work involved, in any manner prohibited by the laws of the United States or of the State of Connecticut; and the Contractor further agrees to take affirmative action to insure that applicants with job-related qualifications are employed and that employees are treated when employed without regard to their race, color, religious creed, age, marital status, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender identity or expression, intellectual disability, mental disability or physical disability, including, but not limited to, blindness, unless it is shown by the Contractor that such disability prevents performance of the work involved; (2) the Contractor agrees, in all solicitations or advertisements for employees placed by or on behalf of the Contractor, to state that it is an “affirmative action-equal opportunity employer” in accordance with regulations adopted by the Commission; (3) the Contractor agrees to provide each labor union or representative of workers with which the Contractor has a collective bargaining Agreement or other contract or understanding and each contractor with which the Contractor has a contract or understanding, a notice to be provided by the Commission, advising the labor union or workers’ representative of the Contractor’s commitments under this section and to post copies of the notice in conspicuous places available to employees and applicants for employment; (4) the Contractor agrees to comply with each provision of this Section and Connecticut General Statutes §§ 46a-68e and 46a-68f and with each regulation or relevant order issued by said Commission pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §§ 46a-56, 46a-68e and 46a-68f; and (5) the Contractor agrees to provide the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities with such information requested by the Commission, and permit access to pertinent books, records and accounts, concerning the employment practices and procedures of the Contractor as relate to the provisions of this Section and Connecticut General Statutes § 46a-56. If the contract is a public works contract, the Contractor agrees and warrants that he will make good faith efforts to employ minority business enterprises as subcontractors and suppliers of materials on such public works projects.
- B. Determination of the Contractor’s good faith efforts shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following factors: The Contractor’s employment and subcontracting policies, patterns and practices; affirmative advertising, recruitment and training; technical assistance activities and such other reasonable activities or efforts as the Commission may prescribe that are designed to ensure the participation of minority business enterprises in public works projects.
- C. The Contractor shall develop and maintain adequate documentation, in a manner prescribed by the Commission, of its good faith efforts.
- D. The Contractor shall include the provisions of subsection (b) of this Section in every subcontract or purchase order entered into in order to fulfill any obligation of a contract with the State and such provisions shall be binding on a subcontractor, contractor or manufacturer unless exempted by regulations or orders of the Commission. The Contractor shall take such action with respect to any such subcontract or purchase order as the Commission may direct as a means of enforcing such provisions including sanctions for noncompliance in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §46a-56; provided if such Contractor becomes involved in, or is threatened with, litigation with a

subcontractor or contractor as a result of such direction by the Commission, the Contractor may request the State of Connecticut to enter into any such litigation or negotiation prior thereto to protect the interests of the State and the State may so enter.

- E. The Contractor agrees to comply with the regulations referred to in this Section as they exist on the date of this Contract and as they may be adopted or amended from time to time during the term of this Contract and any amendments thereto.
- F. (1) The Contractor agrees and warrants that in the performance of the Contract such Contractor will not discriminate or permit discrimination against any person or group of persons on the grounds of sexual orientation, in any manner prohibited by the laws of the United States or the State of Connecticut, and that employees are treated when employed without regard to their sexual orientation; (2) the Contractor agrees to provide each labor union or representative of workers with which such Contractor has a collective bargaining Agreement or other contract or understanding and each contractor with which such Contractor has a contract or understanding, a notice to be provided by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities advising the labor union or workers' representative of the Contractor's commitments under this section, and to post copies of the notice in conspicuous places available to employees and applicants for employment; (3) the Contractor agrees to comply with each provision of this section and with each regulation or relevant order issued by said Commission pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 46a-56; and (4) the Contractor agrees to provide the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities with such information requested by the Commission, and permit access to pertinent books, records and accounts, concerning the employment practices and procedures of the Contractor which relate to the provisions of this Section and Connecticut General Statutes § 46a-56.
- G. The Contractor shall include the provisions of the foregoing paragraph in every subcontract or purchase order entered into in order to fulfill any obligation of a contract with the State and such provisions shall be binding on a subcontractor, contractor or manufacturer unless exempted by regulations or orders of the Commission. The Contractor shall take such action with respect to any such subcontract or purchase order as the Commission may direct as a means of enforcing such provisions including sanctions for noncompliance in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes § 46a-56; provided, if such Contractor becomes involved in, or is threatened with, litigation with a subcontractor or contractor as a result of such direction by the Commission, the Contractor may request the State of Connecticut to enter into any such litigation or negotiation prior thereto to protect the interests of the State and the State may so enter.

#### V. FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT

In all respects, Contractor shall comply with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For purposes of this contract, FERPA includes any amendments or other relevant provisions of federal law, as well as all requirements of Chapter 99 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time. Nothing in this agreement may be construed to allow Contractor to maintain, use, disclose or share student information in a manner not allowed by federal law or regulation or by this contract. Contractor agrees that it shall not provide any student information obtained under this contract to any party ineligible to receive data protected by FERPA. This section shall survive the termination, cancellation or expiration of the contract.

V. WHISTLEBLOWER

This contract may be subject to the provisions of Section 4-61dd of the Connecticut General Statutes. In accordance with this statute, if an officer, employee or appointing authority of the Contractor takes or threatens to take any personnel action against any employee of the Contractor in retaliation for such employee's disclosure of information to any employee of the contracting state or quasi-public agency or the Auditors of Public Accounts or the Attorney General under the provisions of subsection (a) of such statute, the Contractor shall be liable for a civil penalty of not more than five thousand dollars for each offense, up to a maximum of twenty per cent of the value of this contract. Each violation shall be a separate and distinct offense and in the case of a continuing violation, each calendar day's continuance of the violation shall be deemed to be a separate and distinct offense. The State may request that the Attorney General bring a civil action in the Superior Court for the Judicial District of Hartford to seek imposition and recovery of such civil penalty. In accordance with subsection (f) of such statute, each large state contractor, as defined in the statute, shall post a notice of the provisions of the statute relating to large state contractors in a conspicuous place which is readily available for viewing by the employees of the contractor.

VII. AUDIT CLAUSE FOR STATE GRANTS

For purposes of this clause, the word "Contractor" shall be read to mean "nonstate entity," as that term is defined in Connecticut General Statutes § 4-230. The Contractor shall provide for an annual financial audit acceptable to the agency for any expenditure of State-awarded funds made by the Contractor. Such audit shall include management letters and audit recommendations. The State Auditors of Public Accounts shall have access to all records and accounts for the fiscal year(s) in which the award was made. The Contractor will comply with federal and State single audit standards as applicable.

VIII. DISCLOSURE OF RECORDS

This Contract may be subject to the provisions of section 1-218 of the Connecticut General Statutes. In accordance with this statute, each contract in excess of two million five hundred thousand dollars between a public agency and a person for the performance of a governmental function shall (a) provide that the public agency is entitled to receive a copy of records and files related to the performance of the governmental function, and (b) indicate that such records and files are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and may be disclosed by the public agency pursuant to FOIA. No request to inspect or copy such records or files shall be valid unless the request is made to the public agency in accordance with FOIA. Any complaint by a person who is denied the right to inspect or copy such records or files shall be brought to the Freedom of Information Commission in accordance with the provisions of sections 1-205 and 1-206 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

IX. CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION RESTRICTIONS

For all State contracts as defined in Connecticut General Statutes § 9-612(g) the authorized signatory to this contract expressly acknowledges receipt of the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) notice advising state contractors of state campaign contribution and solicitation prohibitions, and will inform its principles of the contents of the notice. See Form reproduced and inserted below.



## Notice to Executive Branch State Contractors and Prospective State Contractors of Campaign Contribution and Solicitation Limitations

This notice is provided under the authority of Connecticut General Statutes §9-612(g)(2), as amended by P.A. 10-1, and is for the purpose of informing state contractors and prospective state contractors of the following law (*italicized words are defined on the reverse side of this page*).

### CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION AND SOLICITATION LIMITATIONS

No *state contractor, prospective state contractor, principal of a state contractor or principal of a prospective state contractor*, with regard to a *state contract or state contract solicitation* with or from a state agency in the executive branch or a quasi-public agency or a holder, or principal of a holder of a valid prequalification certificate, shall make a contribution to (i) an exploratory committee or candidate committee established by a candidate for nomination or election to the office of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, State Comptroller, Secretary of the State or State Treasurer, (ii) a political committee authorized to make contributions or expenditures to or for the benefit of such candidates, or (iii) a party committee (which includes town committees).

In addition, no holder or principal of a holder of a valid prequalification certificate, shall make a contribution to (i) an exploratory committee or candidate committee established by a candidate for nomination or election to the office of State senator or State representative, (ii) a political committee authorized to make contributions or expenditures to or for the benefit of such candidates, or (iii) a party committee.

On and after January 1, 2011, no state contractor, prospective state contractor, principal of a state contractor or principal of a prospective state contractor, with regard to a state contract or state contract solicitation with or from a state agency in the executive branch or a quasi-public agency or a holder, or principal of a holder of a valid prequalification certificate, shall **knowingly solicit** contributions from the state contractor's or prospective state contractor's employees or from a *subcontractor or principals of the subcontractor* on behalf of (i) an exploratory committee or candidate committee established by a candidate for nomination or election to the office of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, State Comptroller, Secretary of the State or State Treasurer, (ii) a political committee authorized to make contributions or expenditures to or for the benefit of such candidates, or (iii) a party committee.

### DUTY TO INFORM

State contractors and prospective state contractors are required to inform their principals of the above prohibitions, as applicable, and the possible penalties and other consequences of any violation thereof.

### PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS

Contributions or solicitations of contributions made in violation of the above prohibitions may result in the following civil and criminal penalties:

**Civil penalties**—Up to \$2,000 or twice the amount of the prohibited contribution, whichever is greater, against a principal or a contractor. Any state contractor or prospective state contractor which fails to make reasonable efforts to comply with the provisions requiring notice to its principals of these prohibitions and the possible consequences of their violations may also be subject to civil penalties of up to \$2,000 or twice the amount of the prohibited contributions made by their principals.

**Criminal penalties**—Any knowing and willful violation of the prohibition is a Class D felony, which may subject the violator to imprisonment of not more than 5 years, or not more than \$5,000 in fines, or both.

### CONTRACT CONSEQUENCES

In the case of a state contractor, contributions made or solicited in violation of the above prohibitions may result in the contract being voided.

In the case of a prospective state contractor, contributions made or solicited in violation of the above prohibitions shall result in the contract described in the state contract solicitation not being awarded to the prospective state contractor, unless the State Elections Enforcement Commission determines that mitigating circumstances exist concerning such violation.

The State shall not award any other state contract to anyone found in violation of the above prohibitions for a period of one year after the election for which such contribution is made or solicited, unless the State Elections Enforcement Commission determines that mitigating circumstances exist concerning such violation.

Additional information may be found on the website of the State Elections Enforcement Commission, [www.ct.gov/seeec](http://www.ct.gov/seeec). Click on the link to "Lobbyist/Contractor Limitations."





## DEFINITIONS

"State contractor" means a person, business entity or nonprofit organization that enters into a state contract. Such person, business entity or nonprofit organization shall be deemed to be a state contractor until December thirty-first of the year in which such contract terminates. "State contractor" does not include a municipality or any other political subdivision of the state, including any entities or associations duly created by the municipality or political subdivision exclusively amongst themselves to further any purpose authorized by statute or charter, or an employee in the executive or legislative branch of state government or a quasi-public agency, whether in the classified or unclassified service and full or part-time, and only in such person's capacity as a state or quasi-public agency employee.

"Prospective state contractor" means a person, business entity or nonprofit organization that (i) submits a response to a state contract solicitation by the state, a state agency or a quasi-public agency, or a proposal in response to a request for proposals by the state, a state agency or a quasi-public agency, until the contract has been entered into, or (ii) holds a valid prequalification certificate issued by the Commissioner of Administrative Services under section 4a-100.

"Prospective state contractor" does not include a municipality or any other political subdivision of the state, including any entities or associations duly created by the municipality or political subdivision exclusively amongst themselves to further any purpose authorized by statute or charter, or an employee in the executive or legislative branch of state government or a quasi-public agency, whether in the classified or unclassified service and full or part-time, and only in such person's capacity as a state or quasi-public agency employee.

"Principal of a state contractor or prospective state contractor" means (i) any individual who is a member of the board of directors of, or has an ownership interest of five per cent or more in, a state contractor or prospective state contractor, which is a business entity, except for an individual who is a member of the board of directors of a nonprofit organization, (ii) an individual who is employed by a state contractor or prospective state contractor, which is a business entity, as president, treasurer or executive vice president, (iii) an individual who is the chief executive officer of a state contractor or prospective state contractor, which is not a business entity, or if a state contractor or prospective state contractor has no such officer, then the officer who duly possesses comparable powers and duties, (iv) an officer or an employee of any state contractor or prospective state contractor who has managerial or discretionary responsibilities with respect to a state contract, (v) the spouse or a dependent child who is eighteen years of age or older of an individual described in this subparagraph, or (vi) a political committee established or controlled by an individual described in this subparagraph or the business entity or nonprofit organization that is the state contractor or prospective state contractor.

"State contract" means an agreement or contract with the state or any state agency or any quasi-public agency, let through a procurement process or otherwise, having a value of fifty thousand dollars or more, or a combination or series of such agreements or contracts having a value of one hundred thousand dollars or more in a calendar year, for (i) the rendition of services, (ii) the furnishing of any goods, material, supplies, equipment or any items of any kind, (iii) the construction, alteration or repair of any public building or public work, (iv) the acquisition, sale or lease of any land or building, (v) a licensing arrangement, or (vi) a grant, loan or loan guarantee. "State contract" does not include any agreement or contract with the state, any state agency or any quasi-public agency that is exclusively federally funded, an education loan, a loan to an individual for other than commercial purposes or any agreement or contract between the state or any state agency and the United States Department of the Navy or the United States Department of Defense.

"State contract solicitation" means a request by a state agency or quasi-public agency, in whatever form issued, including, but not limited to, an invitation to bid, request for proposals, request for information or request for quotes, inviting bids, quotes or other types of submittals, through a competitive procurement process or another process authorized by law waiving competitive procurement.

"Managerial or discretionary responsibilities with respect to a state contract" means having direct, extensive and substantive responsibilities with respect to the negotiation of the state contract and not peripheral, clerical or ministerial responsibilities.

"Dependent child" means a child residing in an individual's household who may legally be claimed as a dependent on the federal income tax of such individual.

"Solicit" means (A) requesting that a contribution be made, (B) participating in any fund-raising activities for a candidate committee, exploratory committee, political committee or party committee, including, but not limited to, forwarding tickets to potential contributors, receiving contributions for transmission to any such committee or bundling contributions, (C) serving as chairperson, treasurer or deputy treasurer of any such committee, or (D) establishing a political committee for the sole purpose of soliciting or receiving contributions for any committee. Solicit does not include: (i) making a contribution that is otherwise permitted by Chapter 155 of the Connecticut General Statutes, (ii) informing any person of a position taken by a candidate for public office or a public official, (iii) notifying the person of any activities of, or contact information for, any candidate for public office, or (iv) serving as a member in any party committee or as an officer of such committee that is not otherwise prohibited in this section.

"Subcontractor" means any person, business entity or nonprofit organization that contracts to perform part or all of the obligations of a state contractor's state contract. Such person, business entity or nonprofit organization shall be deemed to be a subcontractor until December thirty first of the year in which the subcontract terminates. "Subcontractor" does not include (i) a municipality or any other political subdivision of the state, including any entities or associations duly created by the municipality or political subdivision exclusively amongst themselves to further any purpose authorized by statute or charter, or (ii) an employee in the executive or legislative branch of state government or a quasi-public agency, whether in the classified or unclassified service and full or part-time, and only in such person's capacity as a state or quasi-public agency employee.

"Principal of a subcontractor" means (i) any individual who is a member of the board of directors of, or has an ownership interest of five per cent or more in, a subcontractor, which is a business entity, except for an individual who is a member of the board of directors of a nonprofit organization, (ii) an individual who is employed by a subcontractor, which is a business entity, as president, treasurer or executive vice president, (iii) an individual who is the chief executive officer of a subcontractor, which is not a business entity, or if a subcontractor has no such officer, then the officer who duly possesses comparable powers and duties, (iv) an officer or an employee of any subcontractor who has managerial or discretionary responsibilities with respect to a subcontract with a state contractor, (v) the spouse or a dependent child who is eighteen years of age or older of an individual described in this subparagraph, or (vi) a political committee established or controlled by an individual described in this subparagraph or the business entity or nonprofit organization that is the subcontractor.



X. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The statutory authority for the CSBE to enter into this Agreement is Connecticut General Statutes §§ 4-5, 4-8, and 10-66aa (6). The statutory authority for the Charter Board to enter into this Agreement is Connecticut General Statutes § 10-66aa (6).

XI. ENTIRE AGREEMENT

This written Agreement shall constitute the entire Agreement between the Parties and no other terms and conditions in any document, acceptance or acknowledgment shall be effective or binding unless expressly agreed to in writing by CSBE. This Agreement may not be changed other than by a formal written amendment signed by the parties hereto and approved by the Connecticut Attorney General.

XII. AMENDMENTS

Revisions to this Agreement's objectives, services, or plan must be approved in writing by the CSBE. A formal amendment, in writing, shall not be effective until executed by both parties to the Agreement and approved by the Connecticut Attorney General, and shall be required for extensions to the final date of the Agreement period, revisions to the maximum payment, and any other revision determined material by either party.

XIII. GOVERNING LAW AND ENFORCEABILITY

This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of Connecticut without regard to its principles of conflicts of laws. The Charter Board shall at all times comply and observe all federal and state laws, local laws, ordinances and regulations which are in effect during the period of this Agreement and which in any manner affect the work or its conduct.

XIV. LEGAL FORCE AND EFFECT

This Agreement shall have no legal force and effect until it is approved as to form and signed by the Connecticut Attorney General. The CSBE shall assume no liability for performance of services under the terms of this Agreement until the Charter Board is notified by CSBE that this Agreement has been approved.

XV. SEVERABILITY

If any provision of this Agreement shall be held invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, such holding shall not invalidate any other provision hereof.

XVI. CLAIMS AGAINST THE STATE

The Charter Board agrees that the sole and exclusive means for the presentation of any claim against the State arising from this Agreement shall be in accordance with Chapter 53 of the Connecticut General Statutes (Claims Against the State), and the School further agrees not to initiate legal proceedings in any state or federal court in addition to, or in lieu of, said Chapter 53 proceedings.

XVII. SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY

The Parties acknowledge and agree that nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as a modification, compromise or waiver by the State of any rights or defenses of any immunities provided by federal law or the laws of the State of Connecticut to the State or any of its officers and employees, which they may have had, now have or will have with respect to all matters arising out of this Agreement. To the extent that this section conflicts with any other section, this section shall govern.

#### XVIII. EXECUTIVE ORDERS

This Agreement is subject to Executive Order No. 3 of Governor Thomas J. Meskill, promulgated June 16, 1971, concerning labor employment practices; Executive Order No. 17 of Governor Thomas J. Meskill, promulgated February 15, 1973, concerning the listing of employment openings; Executive Order No.16 of Governor John G. Rowland, promulgated August 4, 1999, concerning violence in the workplace, all of which are incorporated into and are made a part of the Contract as if they had been fully set forth in it. This Contract may also be subject to Executive Order 14 of Governor M. Jodi Rell, promulgated April 17, 2006, concerning procurement of cleaning products and services and to Executive Order No. 49 of Governor Dannel P. Malloy, promulgated May 22, 2015, mandating disclosure of certain gifts to public employees and contributions to certain candidates for office. If Executive Order 14 and/or Executive Order 49 are applicable, they are deemed to be incorporated into and are made a part of the Contract as if it had been fully set forth in it. At the Contractor's request, the CSBE or the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services shall provide a copy of these orders to the Contractor.

#### XIX. NO WAIVER

The Parties agree that no assent, express or implied, to any breach by either party of any one or more of the provisions of this Contract shall constitute a waiver of any other breach.

#### XX. NO THIRD-PARTY BENEFICIARY

This Contract shall not create any rights in any third parties who have not entered into this Contract, nor shall any third party be entitled to enforce any rights or obligations that may be possessed by either party to this Contract.

#### XXI. FORCE MAJEURE

Neither Party shall be in breach of this Contract if the performance of any part or all of this Contract is prevented, delayed, hindered, or otherwise made impracticable or impossible because of strike, flood, tornado, hurricane, riot, explosion, war, act of God, sabotage, accident, or any other casualty or cause beyond either Party's control and that cannot be overcome by reasonable diligence and without unusual expense.

#### XXII. NON-ASSIGNMENT

No right or duty, in whole or in part, of the Charter Board under this Agreement may be assigned or delegated without the prior written consent of the CSBE.

# EXHIBIT B

**V.F.**

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO BE PROPOSED:**

May 3, 2017

**RESOLVED**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Trailblazers Academy from July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2021, subject to the conditions noted in the Commissioner's May 3, 2017, 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 May, Two Thousand Seventeen.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dianna R. Wentzell, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** May 3, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Renewal of State Charter – Trailblazers Academy Charter School, Stamford

*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, and correspondence 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**

Trailblazers Academy Charter School (TA) opened in the fall of 1999 and serves 129 students in Grades 6-8, primarily from the City of Stamford (the host district). Table 1 on page 13, of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides 2015-16 student enrollment and demographic data. 93.6 percent of TA's students qualify for free or reduced price meals and 32 percent of students receive special education services. TA's mission states, in part, "to successfully transition students to high school on track to go to college. While maintaining small classes and fostering positive relationships, the school works to build a strong academic foundation for each student by emphasizing core subjects, high academic standards, life skills and character development." From its inception the school seeks and attracts students who have failed in the traditional school setting. The profile for the average TA student involves encounters with the Department of Children and Families and clinical diagnosis involving cognitive or social maladies. Seven percent of students currently have open cases with the Department of Children and Families and 8.5 percent of students are currently on juvenile probation.

Historically, students enter TA significantly below grade level achievement in literacy and numeracy. On average, TA's students enter three grade levels behind in reading and math according to their STAR benchmark assessments. These significant deficits are reflected in low Smarter Balanced scores. The percentage of TA students in Grades 6-8 meeting or exceeding the achievement standard on the 2016 Smarter Balance Assessment remained in the single digits for each grade and content area with one exception, Grade 8 ELA (26.3). To help address student needs, the school utilizes small class size for increased individualized attention, and a wrap-around service model that emphasizes literacy skills remediation, family advocacy services and extended learning time opportunities. TA continues to focus on improving each student's rate of growth with a goal of one grade level growth per year. As a result, TA has instituted numerous programmatic changes to address these needs with a redesign of the curriculum in mathematics, English language arts, and social studies, the addition of a math and ELA coach to improve instructional practices, and implementing explicit strategy instruction.

TA was identified by the CSDE in March 2016 as a Category 5 Turnaround school. A Category 5 Turnaround school is a school that is among the lowest performing schools in Connecticut that was identified in 2014-15 and remains on the list in 2015-16. The school culture and climate data (Table 2) indicate the school has serious student attendance issues and student behavior issues. TA average daily attendance rate of 87.0 percent in 2015-16 is below the state goal of 95.0 percent. Although the 2015-16 chronic absenteeism rate of 18.6 is almost twice the state chronic absenteeism rate of 9.6 percent, this is a dramatic improvement of the 65.9 percent rate reported in 2014-15. Interventions such as family advocates and transportation assessments and accommodations are part of the strategies being utilized and should continue. It is noted that the 2015-16 suspension rate of 30.2 percent is over four times the state average of 7.0 percent. TA's school population is unique, in that it serves students who were not able to meet the behavioral expectations of the prior school placement and approximately 1/3 of students are new each year.

## **Charter Renewal Process**

*Application for Renewal of Charter:* The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of TA's charter on September 2, 2016. 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. TA submitted data and evidence to substantiate the charter school's written responses.

A review team comprised of CSDE staff with expertise in curriculum, assessment, 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 November 9, 2016, the CSDE review team conducted an on-site visit at TA. The purpose of the renewal on-site visit was to observe TA's programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school's charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through on-site observations, document reviews, interviews and focus groups. The team spoke with board members, administrators, staff, 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 TA from the Superintendent of Stamford and from contiguous school districts: Darien, Greenwich and New Canaan. The CSDE received no letters in favor of or against the renewal of the school's charter.

*Public Hearing:* Stephen Wright, member of the SBE, and CSDE staff held a public hearing on December 20, 2016, in the City of Stamford, and heard from 28 individuals on the potential charter renewal of TA and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the TA community, including family members, students, school staff, board members, alumni and community members. Over 100 people attended the public hearing. Twenty-eight 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.

## **Site Visit Findings**

The most recent available data and information is contained in the Charter Renewal Report, Next Generation Accountability Report 2015-16, Tables 2 and 4 on page 13 and 14 display TA's performance and success according to the four performance standards. The report highlights school strengths and areas for continued growth.

### **Strengths include:**

- Certified audits and annual budgets were completed and submitted on time.
- No significant findings, conditions, or internal weaknesses were uncovered in TA's last three certified financial audits.

TA meets or exceeds the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, signifying overall financial health.

### **Areas of concern include:**

- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced English Language Arts (ELA) assessment (Table 4) is 11.3 percent in Grade 6-8. While this is 38.4 percentage points below Stamford (49.7 percent), it is 44.3 percentage points below the state average (55.6 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced Mathematics assessment (Table 4) is 4.2 percent in Grades 6-8. While this is 36.8 percentage points below Stamford (41.0 percent), it is 39.8 percentage points below the state average (44.0 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment (Table 4) is 2.0 percent in Grade 6. While this is 46.5 percentage points below Stamford (48.5 percent), it is 53.0 percentage points below the state average (55.0 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced ELA assessment (Table 4) is 8.1 percent in Grade 7. While this is 42.5 percentage points below Stamford (50.6 percent), it is 47.1 percentage points below the state average (55.2 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced in ELA assessment (Table 4) is 26.3 percent in Grade 8. While this is 22.8 percentage points below Stamford (49.1 percent), it is 29.2 percentage points below the state average (55.5 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced Mathematics assessment (Table 4) is 2.1 percent in Grade 6. While this is 34.1 percentage points below Stamford (36.2 percent), it is 38.5 percentage points below the state average (40.6 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced Mathematics assessment (Table 4) is 5.4 percent in Grade 7. While this is 37.1 percentage points below Stamford (43.1 percent), it is 36.4 percentage points below the state average (41.8 percent).
- The percentage of TA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) on the Smarter Balanced Mathematics assessment (Table 4) is 5.7 percent in Grade 8. While this is 32.9 percentage points below Stamford (38.6 percent), it is 34.6 percentage points below the state average (40.3 percent).
- Going forward, TA must increase its average daily attendance rate. TA's 2015-16 average daily attendance rate of 87.0 percent is below the state goal of 95.0 percent.
- Going forward, TA must reduce its chronic absenteeism rate. TA's 2015-16 chronic absenteeism rate of 18.6 percent exceeded the state average of 9.6 percent and Stamford's average of 11.7 percent.
- Going forward, TA must reduce its suspension rate. TA's 2015-16 suspension rate was 30.2 percent.



## **Charter Renewal Recommendation**

TA 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. TA must focus on providing increased services in the development of foundational skills as evidenced by the severe deficits in student achievement. The Turnaround Office will work with TA to develop a corrective plan focusing on student achievement:

- Implementation of a comprehensive assessment plan with continued usage of pre- and post-assessment of basic skills. The pre-assessment will indicate whether future diagnostic testing is required and the level of intervention that is necessary to improve student achievement. The post assessment will provide evidence of the rate of growth, determine student competency, and the achievement of growth targets.
- Adjustment of school schedule to provide additional targeted, intensive instruction in reading and mathematics for the neediest students. This time needs to be in addition to the core mathematics and English language arts instruction.
- Incorporation of skills-based scientific, research-based instruction and interventions on decoding, fluency, and numeracy in order to increase students' achievement levels in reading and mathematics. The Turnaround Office will provide technical assistance in the development of a more extensive menu of interventions in reading and mathematics.
- Decision making that is data driven involving student growth and performance relative to peers. The data will help inform long-range goals, instruction, and efficacy of interventions for each student.
- Utilization of high interest/low readability texts in multiple content areas that are matched to students' independent reading level/Lexile score to enable practice of reading more fluently, therefore increasing comprehension.
- Continued evaluation and revamping of curricular materials, instructional strategies and practices to ensure alignment to the Connecticut Core Standards and the inherent level of rigor. Specific efforts need to focus on differentiation in order to support student access to content.

Based on Trailblazers' performance indicators and acknowledging the students served and its mission, the CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school's charter for a period of four years, with the following conditions:

1. By June 2, 2017, TA shall submit a plan for CSDE review and approval to minimize behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions and by adopting a restorative discipline model for the school including: (a) pre-teaching and re-teaching expected behaviors; (b) isolating the root causes of behavioral issues; (c) identifying interventions to target root causes; (d) strengthening school discipline policies and procedures; (e) monitoring interventions, and applying midcourse corrections, as necessary; (f) establishing suspension targets to ensure dramatic improvement; and (g) formulating detailed plans to engage school stakeholders, particularly parents, teachers and administrators, in developing a corrective action. Additionally, TA shall submit its year-to-date number of suspensions, and the concentration of students with one or more suspension to the CSDE twice annually, once in September via the annual reporting process and again at the midyear in January. The plan shall be developed in consultation with CSDE's Turnaround Office. TA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner's acceptance of the plan.
2. By June 2, 2017, TA 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 CSDE's Turnaround Office. TA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner's acceptance of the plan.
3. By June 2, 2017, TA shall submit a corrective action plan acceptable to the Commissioner. The corrective action plan must include measures to improve student academic achievement. The plan shall be developed in consultation with CSDE's Turnaround Office. TA shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner's acceptance of the plan.

The CSDE will notify TA of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on May 3, 2017. 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 that TA is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

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

Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer  
Turnaround Office

**CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | SPRING 2016**

<b>Charter School Information:</b>		
Charter School Name:	Trailblazers Academy Charter School	
School Director:	Miguel Pickering	
School Board Chairperson:	Steven Baker	
Location (City/Town):	Stamford	
<b>Rating Key:</b>		
<b>Meets</b>	The school demonstrates effective policies and practices, resulting in positive outcomes.	
<b>Pending Action</b>	The school requires minor modifications to its policies and/or practices. The school is taking satisfactory measures to remedy and address these issues in a timely manner.	
<b>Does Not Meet</b>	The school falls below performance expectations with significant concerns noted, which require immediate attention and intervention.	
<b>Standard 1: School Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Points/Max</b>	<b>% Points Earned</b>
Accountability Index:	412.3/900	45.8
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>		
<p>Schools that meet Standard 1: School Performance Indicators are schools earning an accountability index score that is in the state’s top three quartiles. Trailblazers Academy’s (TA’s) accountability score of 45.8 places its performance in the bottom quartile, which does not meet Standard 1. TA’s 2015-16 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.</p>		



# Next Generation Accountability Report: 2015-16

Choose a District

Trailblazers Academy District

No:	Indicator	Index Rate	Target	Points Earned	Max Points	% Points Earned	State Avg IndexRate		
1a.	ELA Performance Index – All Students	44.2	75	29.5	50	59.0%	67.7		
1b.	ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students	44.3	75	29.5	50	59.1%	56.7		
1c.	Math Performance Index – All Students	34.7	75	23.2	50	46.3%	61.4		
1d.	Math Performance Index – High Needs Students	34.6	75	23.1	50	46.2%	49.9		
1e.	Science Performance Index – All Students	39.1	75	26.1	50	52.2%	57.5		
1f.	Science Performance Index – High Needs Students	39.0	75	26.0	50	52.0%	47.0		
2a.	ELA Avg. Percentage of Growth Target Achieved – All Students	41.9%	100	41.9	100	41.9%	63.8%		
2b.	ELA Avg. Percentage of Growth Target Achieved – High Needs Students	40.4%	100	40.4	100	40.4%	58.3%		
2c.	Math Avg. Percentage of Growth Target Achieved – All Students	35.6%	100	35.6	100	35.6%	65.0%		
2d.	Math Avg. Percentage of Growth Target Achieved – High Needs Students	35.5%	100	35.5	100	35.5%	57.4%		
4a.	Chronic Absenteeism – All Students	18.6%	<=5%	22.8	50	45.6%	9.6%		
4b.	Chronic Absenteeism – High Needs Students	19.2%	<=5%	21.6	50	43.2%	15.6%		
5	Preparation for CCR – % taking courses	N/A	75%				67.6%		
6	Preparation for CCR – % passing exams	N/A	75%				40.7%		
7	On-track to High School Graduation	69.8%	94%	37.1	50	74.3%	85.1%		
8	4-year Graduation All Students (2015 Cohort)	N/A	94%				87.2%		
9	6-year Graduation - High Needs Students (2013 Cohort)	N/A	94%				78.6%		
10	Postsecondary Entrance (Class of 2015)	N/A	75%				71.9%		
11	Physical Fitness (estimated part rate) and (fitness rate)	94.6%	29.9%	75%	19.9	50	39.8%	89.2%	50.5%
12	Arts Access	N/A	60%				47.5%		
<b>Accountability Index</b>				<b>412.3</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>45.8%</b>			

These statistics represent the results from the second year of Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability Model for districts and schools. For detailed information and resources about every indicator including the rationale for its inclusion, the methodology used as well as links to resources, research, and evidence-based strategies, please consult the document titled Using Accountability Results to Guide Improvement which is available on the [Next Generation Accountability Resources page of the CSDE Performance Office](#).

This model is the direct result of an extensive consultation process over a two year period. The CSDE sought feedback from district and school leaders, Connecticut educators, state and national experts, CSDE staff, and many others. This model was originally outlined in Connecticut's flexibility application to the U.S. Department of Education and formally approved by the USED in August 2015 and is now included in Connecticut's state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Gap Indicators	Non-High Needs Rate*	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean + 1 Stdev**	Is Gap an Outlier?
Achievement Gap Size Outlier?					N
ELA Performance Index Gap	N/A	44.3	N/A	16.5	
Math Performance Index Gap	N/A	34.6	N/A	18.9	
Science Performance Index Gap	N/A	39.0	N/A	17.2	
Graduation Rate Gap (2013 Cohort)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

Participation Rate	Rate
ELA – All Students	96.1%
ELA – High Needs Students	96.0%
Math – All Students	93.0%
Math – High Needs Students	92.9%
Science – All Students	87.8%
Science – High Needs Students	87.5%

Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance, and Management Indicators:	Rating
2.1. Fiscal Management	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.2. Financial Reporting and Compliance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input 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
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Indicator 2.1:</b> CSDE site visit staff reviewed TA’s last three certified financial audits, accounting policies and procedures manual (APPM) and budgets, interviewed the school business manager, school principals and governing board members. The reviewers determined TA completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets. Staff from CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit (OIA) determined the APPM contains the standard sections of an APPM. However, OIA staff did recommend that language about financial policies and procedures, including processes for reviewing, approving, and reconciling bank and credit card statements; credit card issuance and use; purchasing procedures and thresholds; approved check signers and thresholds be strengthened. The CSDE has issued to TA a renewal report indicating issues to be addressed. TA is in the process of making the changes which will be completed and codified at its next governing board meeting. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 2.2:</b> CSDE site visit staff reviewed TA’s last three certified financial audits and uncovered no significant findings, conditions or internal control weakness. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 2.3:</b> Staff from CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit reviewed TA’s last three certified financial audits and determined TA’s debt to asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets), current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities), total margin (net income/revenue) and cash flow (change in cash balance) meet or exceed the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), signifying overall financial health. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 2.4:</b> TA’s policies and procedures regarding open board meetings and board membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules and regulations. This finding was supported by a review of board training records and the review of the school’s website and governing board meeting minutes. A review of board member background checks determined all have completed the process or have initiated the process. CSDE site visit staff reviewed school policies and bylaws and determined they require amending to comply with new CSDE administrative oversight guidelines (e.g., anti-nepotism and conflict of interest). The CSDE has issued to TA a renewal report indicating issues to be addressed. TA is in the process of making the changes which will be completed and codified at its next governing board meeting. </li> <li> <b>Indicator 2.5:</b> As evidenced by the site visit, TA has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. Evidence included proof of property insurance, an approved Stamford Fire Marshal inspection, and approved certificate of occupancy issued by the Stamford Building Department for the facility. </li> </ul>	

Standard 3: Student Population Indicators	Rating
3.1. Recruitment and Enrollment Process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.2. Waitlist and Enrollment Data	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.3. Demographic Representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.4. Family and Community Support	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.5. School Culture and Climate	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indicator 3.1:</b> TA currently serves 129 students primarily from Stamford, the host district, in Grades 6 through 8. A review of the school’s student enrollment policy, and interviews with school staff, board members and parents determined all students are admitted through a blind lottery.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 3.2:</b> A review of TA’s waitlist information (Table 3 page 13) determined that it has not maintained a waitlist for the past two years. The October 2016 student enrollment (129) is 86 percent of the 2016-17 projected student enrollment and well below the state goal of 95.0 percent.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 3.3:</b> A review of TA’s 2015-16 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports students from minority groups represent 95.2 percent of TA’s student population, and 93.6 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students at TA is 32.0 percent. Overall the student body reflects the demographics of the targeted population of high-risk students that the school seeks to serve.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 3.4:</b> TA demonstrates strong community support as evidenced at the on-site visit by the CSDE during the parent interviews. All described the strong communication between the school and families as a key component. Parents and community advocates conveyed overwhelming support for what they perceive is a school that provides a quality alternative educational experience for their children. Over 100 individuals attended the December 20, 2016, renewal public hearing. 28 individuals offered testimony supporting the school’s efforts and the renewal of its charter. No one spoke against the renewal of the school’s charter.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 3.5:</b> A review of TA’s student average daily attendance, chronic absenteeism and suspension rates (Table 2, page 13) are concerning. The average daily attendance rate of students has fallen from 97.4 percent in 2013-14 to 87.0 percent in 2015-16, and is well below the state goal of 95.0 percent. Student chronic absenteeism rate of 18.6 percent in 2015-16 is almost twice the state average of 9.6 percent. Its suspension rate of 30.2 percent is well above the 2015-16 state average of 7.0 percent and over two times the 2014-15 rate of 13.9 percent. TA must take measures to remedy student attendance and address behavior management going forward. The CSDE Turnaround Office will work with the school to assist in these efforts.</li> </ul>	

Standard 4: Legal Compliance Indicators	Rating
4.1. Open Meetings/Information Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.2. Students with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.3. English Learners	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input 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	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.6. Employee Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indicator 4.1:</b> The school website and Governing Board documents demonstrate that Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The Governing Board meeting schedule for the year and meeting agenda are posted on the school’s website. Education records and testing data are secured in locked file cabinets in administration offices.</li> <li>• <b>Indicator 4.2:</b> A review of TA’s 2015-16 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reports the percentage of special education students at the school was 32.0 percent. A review of student records, classroom observations and an interview with the school psychologist were conducted to determine how the school meets the needs of students with disabilities.</li> </ul> <p>PPT meetings are joint endeavors, including the TA special education coordinator (school psychologist), district of residence administrator, and other appropriate staff from the district of residence and TA. Discussions among TA staff, coordinator and parents regarding the development and revisions of IEPs are common. When teachers have concerns about a student who has not been identified as eligible for special education and related services, TA staff conduct observations, review student performance and discuss and implement strategies to address the concerns. If the strategies are found to be ineffective, TA staff submit a referral to the district of residence to conduct an evaluation. Once evaluations have been conducted by the district of residence, TA staff attend a PPT convened by the district of residence to review results of evaluations and to make recommendations. Based on these recommendations, TA will respond as required to meet the student’s needs.</p> <p>TA students with IEPs are integrated into the general classroom environment with occasional pull-outs for more specialized instruction. TA provides on-going differentiation and accommodations as needed by students to ensure their instruction is provided in the least restrictive environment with appropriate inclusion in the school’s academic program, and that they are provided appropriate accommodations during assessments. As evident in the review of student files, the school monitors student progress toward short-term IEP objectives and annual goals that are standard based.</p>	

- **Indicator 4.3:** Classroom observations and staff interviews by the CSDE English Learner consultant during the site visit determined that English Learners (ELs) represent about 2 percent of TA’s current student population. It is evident that TA provides supplemental classroom support to ELs through a bilingual paraprofessional, native language communication with parents or guardians, and the assignment of a bilingual family advocate. A review of TA’s English Learner policies and procedures determined amendments were required to fully align to federal and state guidelines. The CSDE has issued to TA a renewal report indicating the issues requiring corrective action. TA is preparing its corrective action for CSDE review and approval. CSDE expects the process to be completed by May 2017.
- **Indicator 4.4:** TA 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 (BESC) compared the state certified staff file to TA’s employee roster and found at the time of the on-site visit, 14 staff members were properly certified and three were not. The three staff members are in the process of applying for Charter School Educator Permits (CSEPs) with BESC to be in certification compliance. BESC staff will monitor the situation to ensure the certification process for these individuals is completed.
- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of TA employment policies and procedures and interviews with school staff determined the school’s hiring and employment practices ensure protections under the Family Medical Leave Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action and equal opportunity employment.

<b>Prepared by:</b>	<b>Approved by:</b>
Robert Kelly, Charter School Program Manager	Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer



## TRAILBLAZERS ACADEMY DATA

<b>Table 1. 2015-16 Student Enrollment and Demographic Information</b>	
Grades served:	6-8
Total enrollment:	125
Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals:	93.6%
Percentage of special education students:	32.0%
Percentage of students with limited English proficiency:	*
Percentage of minority students:	95.2%
Percentage of Asian students:	*
Percentage of Black students:	45.6%
Percentage of Hispanic students:	49.6%
Percentage of Caucasian students:	*

<b>Table 2: School Culture and Climate Data</b>				
<b>Performance Metric:</b>	<b>2013-14:</b>	<b>2014-15:</b>	<b>2015-16:</b>	<b>STATE</b>
Average daily attendance rate:	97.4%	85.4%	87.0%	
Chronic absenteeism rate:	0.0	65.9%	18.6%	9.6%
Number of in-school suspensions:	9	0	*	
Number of out-of-school suspensions:	17	25	70	
Suspension rate (% students with 1+ suspension):	11.3%	13.9%	30.2%	7.0%
Number of expulsions:	0	0	0	
Cohort graduation rate (if applicable):	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Six Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (if applicable):	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

<b>Table 3: Student Waitlist and Mobility Information</b>			
<b>Performance Metric:</b>	<b>2014-15:</b>	<b>2015-16:</b>	<b>2016-17:</b>
Waitlist number:	6	0	0
Number of enrolled students who left during the school year:	8	10	N/A
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school:	23	9	N/A

**TRAILBLAZERS ACADEMY SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT**

<b>Table 4: Smarter Balanced Assessment - Percentage of students at level 3 and 4 (met/exceeded)</b>				
<b>Subject</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>District-2015-16</b>	<b>State-2015-16</b>
<b>ELA</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>55.6</b>
<b>MATH</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>44.0</b>

<b>Grades 6-8 Smarter Balanced Assessment - Percentage of students at level 3 and 4 (met/exceeded)</b>								
<b>GRADE</b>	<b>ELA 2014-15</b>	<b>ELA 2015-16</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2015-16</b>	<b>STATE 2015-16</b>	<b>MATH 2014-15</b>	<b>MATH 2015-16</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2015-16</b>	<b>STATE 2015-16</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>55.0</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>40.6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>41.8</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>40.3</b>

\*Data suppressed to ensure student data privacy.

**TRAILBLAZERS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL  
TABLES 5-8**

<b>Table 5: 2015-16 Reading Performance</b>							
<b>Star Reading assessment – Percentile Rank metric (PR)</b>							
	<b>Grade Tested</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Fall 2015 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Winter 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Spring 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>
	6	35	2	42	5	47	5
	7	32	6	33	5	30	5
	8	31	3	36	9	37	7

<b>Table 6: 2015-16 Math Performance</b>							
<b>Star Math assessment – Percentile Rank metric (PR)</b>							
	<b>Grade Tested</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Fall 2015 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Winter 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Spring 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>
	6	40	5	41	9	47	7
	7	23	4	31	6	19	4
	8	28	4	37	12	40	13

<b>Table 7: 2016-17 Reading Performance</b>							
<b>Star Reading assessment – Percentile Rank metric (PR)</b>							
	<b>Grade Tested</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Fall 2015 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Winter 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Spring 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>
	6	38	8	39	5	Not yet available	
	7	46	2	46	7		
	8	39	6	41	5		


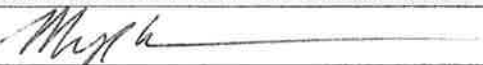
<b>Table 8: 2016-17 Math Performance</b>							
<b>Star Math assessment – Percentile Rank metric (PR)</b>							
	<b>Grade Tested</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Fall 2015 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Winter 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Spring 2016 # Students at Proficiency</b>
	6	37	10	38	12	Not yet available	
	7	45	7	43	9		
	8	39	10	38	10		



## APPENDIX B: RENEWAL APPLICATION

### PART 1: APPLICANT INFORMATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Complete Table 1.A, providing the school's general information.

Table 1.A: Charter School General Information	
Name of Charter School:	Year School Opened:
Trailblazers Academy	1999
Street Address:	City/Zip Code:
83 Lockwood Avenue	Stamford, CT 06902
Name of Board President:	Email/Phone for Board President:
Steve Baker	Steve.baker@cushwake.com
Signature of Board President:	Date:
	9-1-16
Name of Charter School Director:	Email/Phone for Charter School Director:
Miguel Pickering	mpickering@trailblazersacademy.org/203-977-5690
Signature of Charter School Director:	Date:
	9/1/16



2. Provide a concise summary of the school's unique model, student population, performance, and future goals. Provide evidence to substantiate the school's impact and explain why the State Board of Education (SBE) should renew the school's charter.

Domus Kids, Inc., a nonprofit, 501 (c) 3 corporation founded in 1972 and leading Stamford-based provider of social services, education; and advocacy, in conjunction with the Stamford Board of Education and with assistance and guidance from the greater Stamford community and leadership from the Mayor, created **Trailblazers Academy**. **Trailblazers** was designed to provide an alternative choice for students who have been unsuccessful in a regular public school setting and would like to attend a charter school for a second chance at education.

The mission of **Trailblazers Academy** is to successfully transition students to high school on track to go to college. While maintaining small classes and fostering positive relationships, the school builds a strong academic foundation for each student by emphasizing core subjects, high academic standards, life skills, and character development. We seek out and attract students who have failed multiple times and on multiple levels in their prior schools. The profile of our average student is a 3rd grade reading level, a history of truancy, involvement with the CT Department of Children and Families, and clinical diagnoses involving cognitive or social maladies; only 2% reside in a nuclear family situation, and over 90% live under the poverty level. For this reason we emphasize three tenets: attendance, increased literacy skills, and behavior.

### **Target Population**

The target population for the Trailblazers Academy model includes young people who:

- have a full scale IQ of 85 or higher
- demonstrate at least two of the following issues:
  - Qualify for free/reduced lunch
  - Are 3+ years behind grade level in literacy
  - Have a history of school behavioral issues (suspended/expelled; moved schools; internal or external behavioral support referrals; parents called to school for behavior >2 times in a school year)
  - Have been truant (>9 absences per school year)

Students enter **Trailblazers Academy** with a variety of complex academic and/or social and emotional issues. It is our mission to welcome these challenges and provide a uniquely structured educational program to meet the needs of these struggling students and their families. A hallmark of our program is the 3:1 student-to-adult ratio which allows us to personalize educational and social/emotional care for our school community.

**Trailblazers Academy** takes pride in the blend of services that support students and families by assessing and providing for the social and emotional needs of our students. All our staff members, particularly our *family advocates* (professionals who address non-academic barriers to school success), are dedicated to addressing the social and emotional issues our students in order to allow them to achieve academically. It is this blend of educational and social/emotional focus that sets Trailblazers Academy apart from other charter and traditional public schools.

As important as what we do is how we do it. Everything intervention at Domus and at Trailblazers Academy is shaped by our five core principles:



- Our work is about the kids.
- We never give up on people.
- Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect.
- People should have many chances to learn and grow from their mistakes.
- Loving relationships change people.

**Trailblazers Academy Wrap-Around Services Model**

While a rigorous academic experience is core to Trailblazers Academy Charter School, we also offer a comprehensive set of wrap-around services to help youth stay in school and catch up academically. The wrap-around services model is the focus of our school’s theory of change and emphasizes four critical interventions that support our students as they regain lost ground, achieve academically, and make a successful transition to high school. These interventions include:

- *Literacy Skills Remediation:* aligning efforts to close the literacy gap
- *Family Advocacy Services:* mitigating non-academic barriers to learning
- *Out of School/Extended Learning Time Opportunities:* providing additional literacy support and social and emotional enrichment activities including a comprehensive after-school program that operates 150 school days.
- *Follow-Up Services:* tracking the progress of students who have transitioned to high school.

**Student Success Plans (SSPs)**

Teachers and family advocates discuss student SSPs with each other at least three times during the year. They conference with students on their SSPs at least three times during the year: Conferences have resulted in concrete modified goals and plans. School leaders review five SSPs created by each practitioner and provide feedback. Staff use data meetings to review individual and cohort student data that relate to goals in the SSPs. Leaders implement a regular ceremony to celebrate student progress on SSPs.

Goals	Measures of Success
A best-in-class Student Success Plan template and implementation process is designed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Success Plan (SSP) prototype.</li> <li>• Protocols for advisors/counselors to talk with students about their SSPs.</li> </ul>
Student Success Plans are created for each student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Success Plans for each student</li> </ul>
Student Success Plans inform decisions regarding supports and plans for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners discuss students SSPs with each other 3+ times during the year.</li> <li>• Practitioners conference with students on their SSPs 3+ times during the year: Conferences result in concrete modified goals and plans.</li> <li>• Leaders review 5 SSPs created by each practitioner, and provide feedback.</li> <li>• TA practitioners use data meetings to review data on individual students and cohorts of students, with regard to goals in the SSPs.</li> <li>• Leaders implement a regular ceremony to celebrate student progress on SSPs.</li> </ul>
Practitioners knowledgebase on goal-setting, data-analysis and planning will allow them to guild students in developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protocols developed by TA practitioners to guide SSP conferences with students.</li> <li>• TA practitioners undertake 3+ conferences with students</li> </ul>



rigorous, concrete, and achievable SSPs.	on SSPs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaders observe 12+ SSP conferences (4 in each of 3 cycles) and debrief with practitioners.</li></ul>
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### ***Family Advocacy***

Our family advocacy services focus on supporting youth to develop the tools to manage the obstacles that interfere with their ability to engage and succeed in school. Services and activities fall within three main categories.

#### Assessment, Goal Setting, and Plan Development

We assess the needs of youth within 45 days of intake and follow up at regular intervals to measure progress. Once assessed, we develop an individualized action plan together with each young person. Research has shown that goal setting is important because it helps define a clear plan for action and tangible steps for achieving these goals. Additionally, there is emerging evidence from studies on human brain development that the process of simply *creating* goals during adolescence may shape brain function across the lifespan.

#### On-Going Case Management Services

The family advocates focus on getting young people to school on a daily basis. Many of the young people we serve have had poor school attendance for most of their school careers, and it goes without saying that attendance and engagement in the learning process are necessary for any youth to gain the benefits of the education offered at school.

When students do not show up for school, the family advocates find them and bring them to school. We remove any obstacles in the way of school attendance, including childcare, transportation, clothing, or conflicts with peers and/or teachers. For chronic non-attenders, individualized attendance intervention plans are created that include specific incentives and interventions.

#### Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Skill Building

We know the young people with whom we work need help building social and emotional skills. Research shows a correlation between social and emotional competence and academic performance. “Schools that create socially and emotionally sound learning and working environments and that help students and staffs develop greater social and emotional competence, in turn help ensure positive short- and long-term academic and personal outcomes for students, and higher levels of teaching and work satisfaction for staff.” Students who receive SEL instruction have more positive attitudes about school and improved an average of 11 percentile points on standardized achievement tests compared to students who did not receive such instruction.

Family advocates use a range of interventions to build these social and emotional skills. Our advocates provide weekly gender-specific group sessions called Boys Council and Girls Circle. These programs from the One Circle Foundation “promote resiliency and healthy relationships with research-based gender-responsive circle models and best practices.”

We also utilize an evidence-supported, trauma-informed model, the Sanctuary Model, which helps youth heal from trauma. This model offers specific tools our family advocates employ to help young people recover from trauma, including *community meetings*, *S.E.L.F. psycho-educational curriculum*, and *safety plans*. Together, these tools help young people manage their emotions, focus on their future instead of their past, and remain in their classrooms.

We believe these wrap-around services have the potential of supporting youth to engage in school and improve their academic achievement.



**Program Components**

LITERACY SKILLS REMEDIATION			
Activity	Dosage/Duration	Provided By	Staff Training/Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baseline literacy assessment using STAR Reader</li> <li>Progress assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted by within 30 days of enrollment to develop individual literacy goals and action plans</li> </ul>	Literacy teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained by literacy director (outside consultants)</li> <li>Observations</li> <li>One-on-one supervisions</li> </ul>
Reading strategies-based literacy curriculum	Extra reading class for all students 5 days/week, 40 weeks/year during the school day	Literacy teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-going professional development (both in and out of the classroom) with literacy director</li> <li>Observations</li> <li>One-on-one supervisions</li> </ul>
School-wide reading challenge to encourage students to increase reading time with public recognition of goal achievement	Over a 5-week period during the school year	Whole staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literacy dept. and literacy director train all staff</li> </ul>

FAMILY ADVOCACY SERVICES			
Assessment, Goal Setting and Plan Development			
Activity	Dosage/Duration	Provided By	Staff Training/Supervision
Conduct comprehensive baseline assessment using BERS-2 socio-emotional skills assessment tool and ACE trauma assessment tool to ID goals, needs, and challenges, and to develop individual plans to support youth around school attendance, behavior, and s/e skills development.	Within 45 days of enrollment	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained by chief clinical services officer (assessment purposes)</li> <li>Trained by director of performance management (assessment administration)</li> <li>Ongoing individual and group supervision</li> </ul>
Ongoing Case Management Services			
Activity	Dosage/Duration	Provided By	Staff Training/Supervision
Monitor school attendance and follow up with youth and families, including calling home, providing transportation, and IDing and addressing barriers to regular school attendance.	Attendance: daily Follow up: as needed	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained by chief clinical services officer (Domus attendance model)</li> <li>Apricot attendance intervention audits</li> <li>Ongoing individual and group supervision</li> </ul>
Implement intensive	Weekly	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained by chief</li> </ul>





attendance interventions such as school-student-family meetings, schedule adjustments, and assignment of attendance outreach specialist for daily monitoring with student [for students at risk of habitual truancy (repeated absences)].		advocates	clinical services officer (Domus attendance model) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apricot attendance intervention audits</li> <li>• Ongoing individual and group supervision</li> </ul>
Meet with teaching staff to monitor student progress and to address attendance, engagement, and crisis intervention issues	To monitor student progress: weekly  To address other issues: as needed	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apricot attendance intervention audits</li> <li>• Ongoing individual and group supervision</li> </ul>
<b>Social and Emotional Learning and Skill Building</b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Dosage/Duration</b>	<b>Provided By</b>	<b>Staff Training/Supervision</b>
Lead grade appropriate group sessions using the One Circle Foundation curriculum to foster socio-emotional skill building: Girls Circle focused on self-efficacy, body image, and social connection; and Boys Council focused on school engagement.	1 hour/week during the school day for 30 weeks	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained by One Circle Foundation facilitator training</li> <li>• On-going individual and group supervision</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> </ul>
Hold Community Meetings utilizing the Sanctuary Model trauma-informed approach	2x daily during the school day for total of 30 minutes/day, 5 days/week, 40 weeks/year	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sanctuary Institute trauma-informed training</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Community Meeting fidelity checklist</li> </ul>
Utilize the SELF (focus on safety, emotions, loss, and future) psycho-educational curriculum to advance socio-emotional skills	A minimum of 30 hours per year during the school day	Family advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sanctuary Institute trauma informed training</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Ongoing individual and group supervision</li> <li>• Ongoing trauma informed professional development, internally and externally</li> </ul>



## Outcomes and Metrics

We expect the students who attend Trailblazers Academy will:

- Demonstrate growth in social and emotional skills
- Improve school behavior
- Increase literacy scores

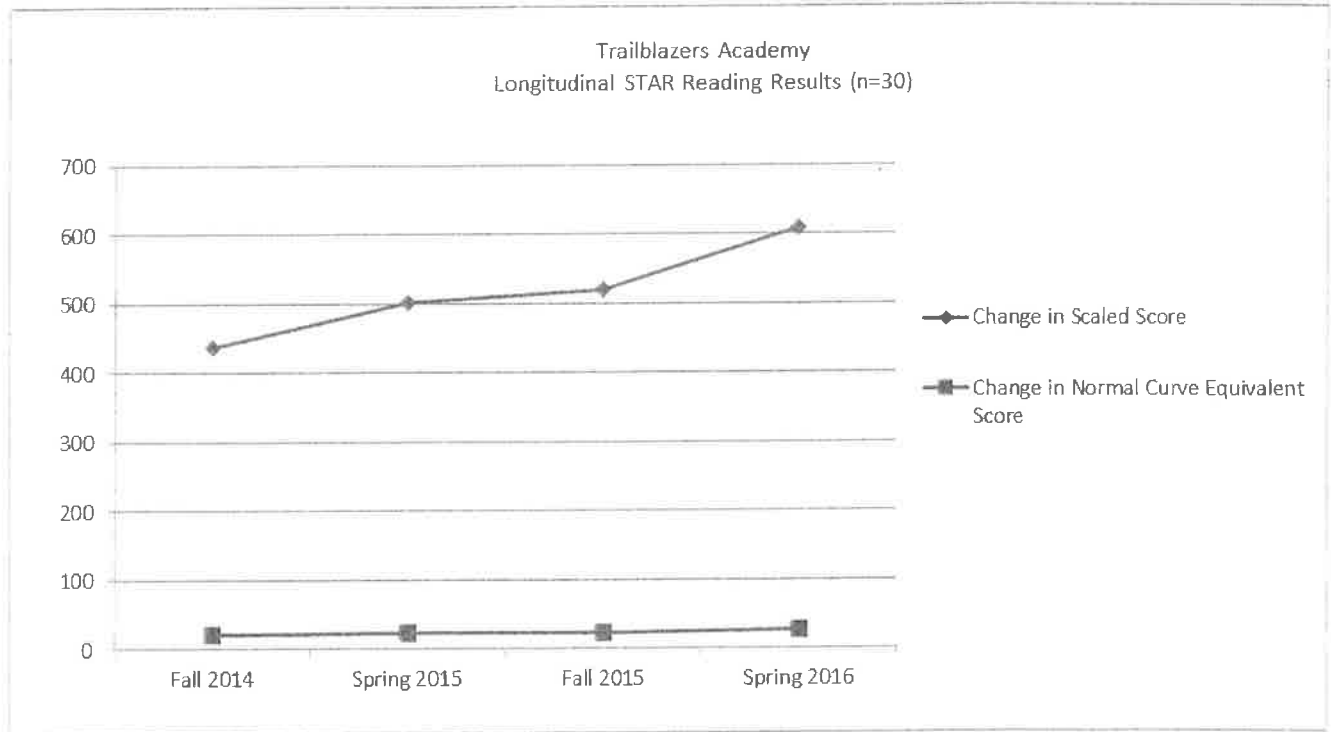
We will collect data around the following metrics:

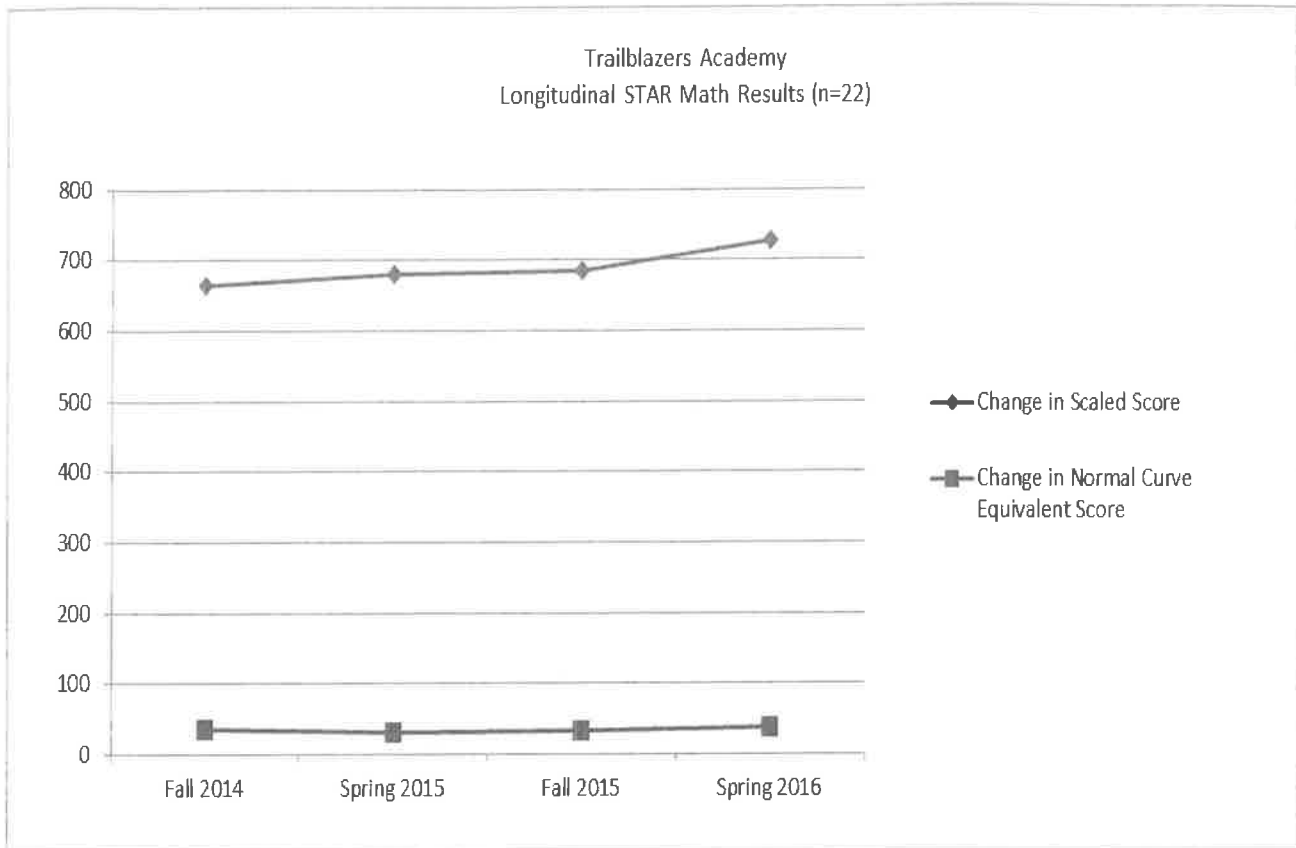
<b>Target population metrics:</b>	<b>Program component metrics:</b>	<b>Outcome Metrics:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Race/Ethnicity</li> <li>• Full Scale IQ of 85 or higher</li> <li>• Eligibility for free/reduced lunch</li> <li>• Have a history of school behavioral issues</li> <li>• Are 3+years behind grade level in literacy (standardized tests)</li> </ul>	<b>Literacy Skills Remediation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline literacy assessment STAR</li> <li>• Total of 180 of direct literacy instruction</li> <li>• Monthly literacy progress assessments</li> <li>• Participation in school-wide Reading Challenge</li> </ul>	<b>Progress Indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly progress assessments on discipline referrals</li> <li>• Mid-year and end of year literacy assessments</li> <li>• Annual progress assessment on BERS-2 (May/June)</li> </ul>
	<b>Family Advocacy:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline and end of year social-emotional assessments, BERS-2</li> <li>• Total of 30 hours group instruction provided by family advocate for 1 hour per week, 30 weeks per year in Girls Circle/Boys Council curriculum</li> <li>• Total of 30 hours group instruction provided by family advocates using Sanctuary Model's SELF curriculum</li> <li>• Baseline school discipline referrals measured</li> </ul>	<b>Interim Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing core courses</li> <li>• No incidence of disciplinary action</li> <li>• Advancement each year to next grade, then graduate</li> </ul>
	<b>Out-Of-School Extended Learning Time:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total of 150 hours of group literacy instruction, provided by after-school programs (as directed by certified literacy teacher)</li> <li>• Total of 60 hours in support and enrichment activities to foster social and emotional learning</li> </ul>	<b>Long-Term Outcome:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete middle school</li> </ul>
	<b>Follow Up:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly follow-up with each young person either in person or by phone</li> </ul>	



**Student Performance**

	Scaled Score			NCE		
	Average Fall 2014 SS	Average Change	Standard Deviation	Average Fall 2014 NCE	Average Change	Standard Deviation
Reading (N=30)						
Fall 2014 to Spring 2016	437.97	171.23	130.57	20.37	7.35	10.61
Fall 2014 to Spring 2015		64.13	131.05		2.34	10.88
Fall 2015 to Spring 2016		90.07	179.72		4.39	14.78
Math (N=22)						
Fall 2014 to Spring 2016	665.14	62.77	86.34	36.50	0.26	15.28
Fall 2014 to Spring 2015		15.86	76.81		-4.84	12.81
Fall 2015 to Spring 2016		42.59	87.20		2.31	14.45





The preceding table and two graphs demonstrate the two-year growth for students attending Trailblazers Academy during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.

The Scaled Score is a standardized score that allows for comparison of student performance over time and across grades. The table and graphs below show that over time, the scaled scores of students at TA are improving. Students started out further behind in reading and see larger gains when compared with math. Improvements are also larger in the 2015-16 school year for both subjects, when compared with the prior academic year.

The NCE score is a norm-referenced score that indicates the percentage of students in the norms groups who obtained lower scores. For example, if a student has an NCE of 27, then 27 percent of the students in the norms sample received lower scores than the student in question. The change in NCE scores in the table and figures below indicate again that relative to the norms group, students are making larger gains in reading. In math, students are improving at a slower rate when compared with the norms group.

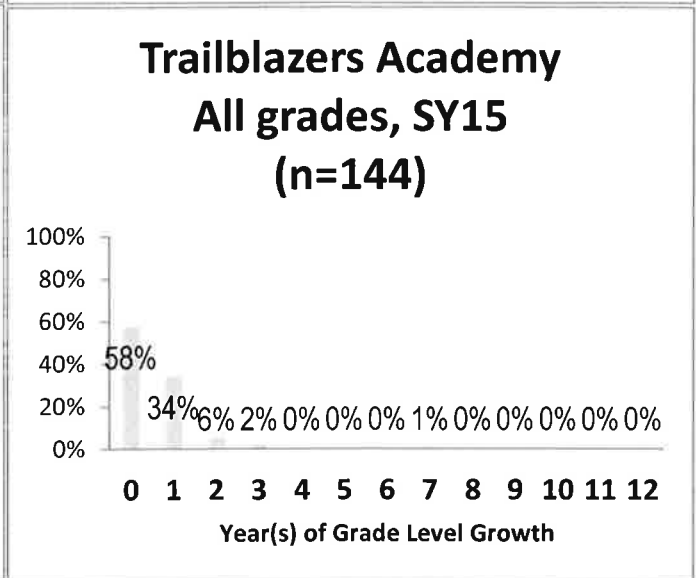
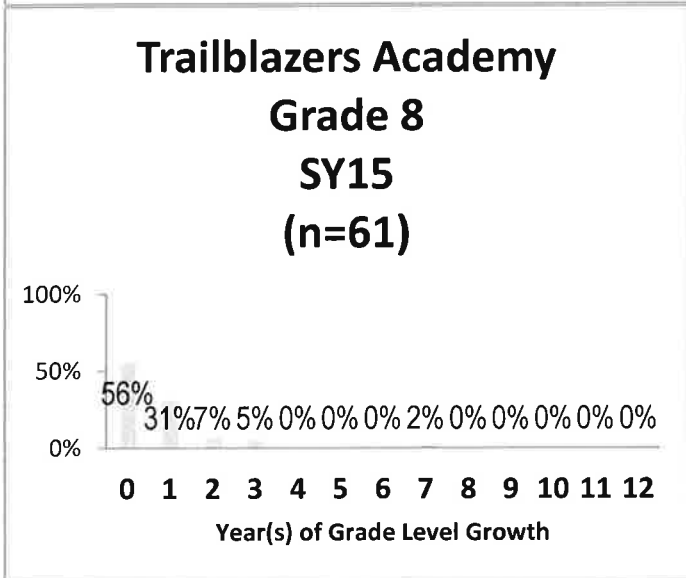
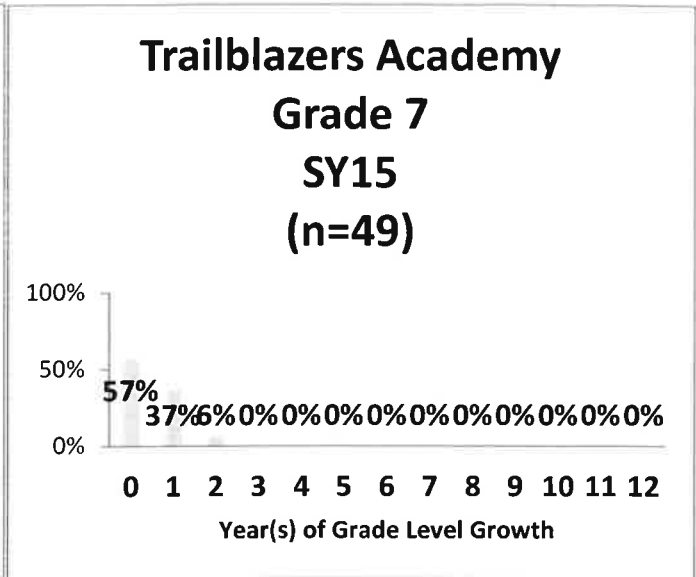
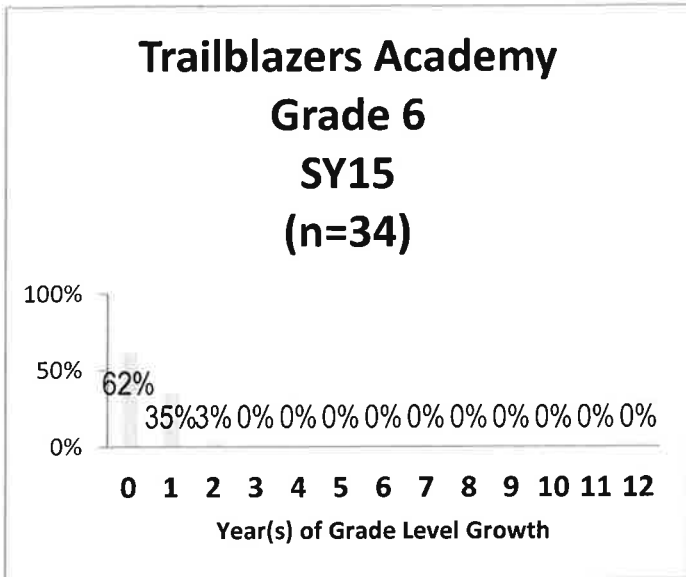
Note: The standard deviation of the average change is included to show there is real variation around that number. For example, while the average change in reading across both years is 171.23 scaled score points, 68% of the sample (or 20 of the 30 students) have an average change of between 40.7 and 301.9. For math that's an average change of between -23.6 and 149.1 for 15 of the 22 students.



STAR Reading and Math Gains During the 2015/16 School Year

	STAR Reading	STAR Math
<u>Average change in NCE scores from fall to spring</u>		
<i>By grade</i>		
6th graders (n=12)	0.88	2.39
7th graders (n=30)	4.09	6.02
8th graders (n=22)	4.74	2.64
<i>By gender</i>		
Female (n=27)	2.00	1.93
Male (n=37)	4.96	5.82
<i>By Behavior</i>		
no suspensions (n=34)	3.66	3.88
1 or more suspensions (in school or out) (n=30)	3.78	4.52
<u>Percent of students with increased grade level equivalent score of 1 or more</u>		
<i>By grade</i>		
6th graders (n=12)	50.0%	33.3%
7th graders (n=30)	43.3%	46.7%
8th graders (n=22)	40.9%	50.0%
<i>By gender</i>		
Female (n=27)	37.0%	37.0%
Male (n=37)	48.6%	51.4%
<i>By Behavior</i>		
no suspensions (n=34)	44.1%	47.1%
1 or more suspensions (in school or out) (n=30)	43.3%	43.3%

Growth figures listed above indicate gains in all categories. On average, 50% of our students increased at least one grade level in math and in reading in 2015-16.



Each year, Trailblazers Academy engages the Stamford Public Schools at many levels. This engagement begins at the board level, starting with personal invitations for each Stamford Board of Education member to tour our school and meet with our leadership team. Further, at least once a year, we speak at a local public board of education meeting to update the board, answer questions, and share our successes. The outreach also happens at the district level. We meet annually with the superintendent and both deputy superintendents (of elementary and secondary) to share practices and gather feedback for our own improvement. Routinely, the chief education officer (superintendent), his staff, and the school director meet with the principals and assistant principals at their quarterly meetings. Finally, this engagement happens at the school level. We meet each school year with building principals, school social workers, and teachers to learn more about how we can serve the city’s most struggling students.



Pursuant to C.G.S.A. § 10-66ss, provide any request for material change in the school’s operation, if applicable. Material change means a change that fundamentally alters a school’s mission, organizational structure, or educational program, including, but not limited to:

- altering the educational model in a fundamental way,
- opening an additional school building,
- contracting for or discontinuing a contract for whole school management services with a charter management organization,
- renaming the charter school,
- changing the grade configurations of the charter school, or
- increasing or decreasing the total student enrollment capacity of the charter school by twenty per cent or more.

No material changes are requested.

In 2014-15 growth was measured through IRL. Again, approximately 50% of our students increased their reading and math scores by at least one grade level.

## PART 2: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

1. Complete Table 5.A, summarizing the school’s culture and climate.

Table 5.A: School Culture and Climate Data		
Performance Metric:	2013-14:	2014-15:
Average daily attendance rate:	97.4	85.4
Chronic absenteeism rate:	0	65.9
Overall suspension rate:	10.5	16.0
Number of in-school suspensions:	9	0
Number of out-of-school suspensions:	17	25
Number of expulsions:	0	0
Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate (if applicable):	N/A	N/A
Six Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (if applicable)	N/A	N/A

\*N<=5. Suppressed to protect student confidentiality.

Discuss the school’s culture and climate (e.g., attendance, student behavior, college-going culture, professional culture). Identify areas for growth and improvement in the school’s climate. Discuss areas of concern and plans to address identified deficiencies, if any.

The culture and climate of the school are represented in the following:

- Student engagement
- Staff engagement
- Staff collaboration
- Parent engagement
- Student discipline



### Student engagement

Trailblazers Academy embarked on an intense implementation of Student Success Plans in the 2015-16 school year. This past year, 100% of our students constructed an SSP and met with their mentors (all students had a minimum of two adults) informally (bi-monthly) and formally (four times during the school year) to establish and monitor progress in two key areas. Students were required to set a short-term goal and a long-term goal as well as outline the tangible steps needed to achieve these goals. In this past school year, 91% of our students achieved their short-term goals. We believe this is attributed to the establishment of SMART goals and the structure and fidelity of the program.

### Staff engagement

In addition, the staff was surveyed weekly (mostly regarding professional development efforts) and monthly to ascertain needs and determine future policy as well as check in on climate. Staff attendance was 95%. Our survey return rate was 94%. A full 100% of staff members reported that they enjoyed working at our school. Over 70% indicated that they received timely feedback from supervisors. They indicated by 93% that access to training was in place. And 96% of our staff participated in non-mandatory opportunities to serve and students and their families.

### Staff collaboration

In the 2015-16 school year:

- Staff participated in 23 school-wide training sessions.
- Teachers participated in 3.5-hour weekly pedagogy PD (130 hours).
- We conducted 15 grade-level meetings.
- The staff led 11 PD sessions.
- The instructional leadership team conducted over 80 coaching observations and 40 formal observations of teaching and learning.
- Outside consultants performed over 50 observations and coaching sessions.

### Parent engagement

Over 70% of our parents volunteered at least 30 hours for the school. We exceeded by 10% our school-wide goal of staff/teacher communication goal that 80% of parents would indicate they receive frequent and sufficient communication from the school. Our families were represented at a rate of 88% for all school-wide functions and celebrations (family nights, barbeques, information sessions, Thanksgiving holiday meal, academic nights, etc.). Our survey participation rate (parents were surveyed twice during the year) was 80%.

### Student discipline

Student suspensions (both in- and out-of-school) were 110 (2014-15) and 140 (2015-6). A number of students had multiple suspensions: 24 in 2014-15 and 33 in 2015-16. The average length of suspensions at the school was 2 days and 2.76 days respectively. Two students were arrested in 2014-5 and none in 2015-6. Trailblazers has had fewer than 10 incidents of bullying for the past three consecutive years. When serving students with a history of behavior issues, it is important that we create and adhere to high-stakes, high-standards behavioral protocols. Because our mission is to attract high-risk students, the school will have, by design, higher suspension rates than those of other public schools.





Describe the school’s academic program and efforts to align to the Common Core State Standards and next-generation assessments. Describe efforts to support special education students, high-risk students, and English learners (ELs). Identify areas for growth and improvement in the school’s academic program. Discuss areas of concern and plans to address identified deficiencies, if any.

**Academic Program Design**

In summer 2015, Trailblazers Academy hired the independent educational consulting firm ReDesign. Over the past decade, reDesign has supported over 50 schools that serve at-risk young people. reDesign currently focuses on institute/program design, leadership development, instructional coaching and professional development, curriculum and assessment design and curation, knowledge building, school design, and design of mastery-based learning systems. They have worked with many schools and districts, including the New York City Department of Education Transfer School Common Core Institute, Michigan Future Schools & The Building Excellent Schools Fellowship Program, and Schools for the Future and The School District of Philadelphia. Below is a comprehensive plan laid out for our work with ReDesign over the upcoming year.

With our partnership with reDesign, we aim to improve the quality of instruction across our school and create a superior academic management program to measure and react to student progress. Our educational leaders will, in partnership with reDesign, focus on four major efforts:

- designing a performance management system;
- developing instructional leadership capacity;
- strengthening teacher capacity
- implementing a personalized student success system that supports students in social-emotional development, academic achievement, and college-career readiness.

**FEI Units (defined)**

	COMPONENTS OF THE FEI	INSTRUCTIONAL EXAMPLES
A.	Identify the specific Common Core or other learning standard/target that will be addressed in the lesson.	Lessons need to be organized around helping students gain proficiency on the learning standards. While an individual lesson might not be specifically tied to a standard, groups of lessons will be
B	Articulate an objective for the lesson that (1) describes concrete and measurable content and skills; (2) aligned to specific Common Core standards; and (3) will be explored through analysis, evaluation and synthesis (Blooms' Higher-Order Thinking). (The same practice should be used for units as well).	Each lesson should be organized around a big idea. This could be a focusing question or an essential understanding: Ex: "Why are some of the rules for binomials different than those for polynomials?" "Is nurture more powerful than nature?" "Why do some people break the law while others don't?"
C.	Set clear learning strategy goals for each day (see #2c, d, and e below).	Learning strategies (see #2c, d, and e below) Ex: "Students will be able to make a prediction." "Students will be able to explain the difference between an inference and a prediction." "Students will be able to establish criteria to evaluate the quality of an essay or presentation." "Students will learn to use "fix-it" strategies if they become confused while reading"
D	Select the resources that will best support students in reaching the objective.	Ideally, these will be a mix of print and visual, and aural materials, and the print materials will be of different reading levels. This is one of the ways that teachers can differentiate instruction. Ex: nonfiction texts, short stories, poems, music, videotapes, books on tape, pod casts, internet simulations, charts, graphs, art, cartoons, textbooks, and Regents practice questions
E.	Assessment: Decide how students will show what they now understand about the objective, AND effective usage of the	Ex: A reflection on something that was learned, a quiz, "dip-sticking," responding to the focusing question, a



	learning strategy. (see #4a and b below).	presentation, a formal writing assignment
	<b>LESSON LAUNCH (THE FIRST 20% OF THE LESSON)</b>	
A.	Build-Background: • Connect instruction to what students already know about the topic; • Connect students' previous knowledge to new information; • Introduce critical information and vocabulary that will help students explore important questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask what students remember or know about a topic. Ask how new information relates to previous learning. Refer to previously constructed word banks, outlines, charts, maps, etc. Use Anticipatory Guides such as a K-W-L chart</li> <li>• Introduce important concepts and words by writing, speaking, repeating, and highlighting them. Have students create personal thesaurus/dictionaries, concept/word walls, concept maps, word sorts, concept/word study books</li> <li>• "Do-Now," think-aloud, mini-lecture, simulation/demo, model</li> </ul>
B.	Ensure student understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly explain academic tasks;</li> <li>• Check for comprehension and recall regularly;</li> <li>• Anticipate and prepare to clarify confusions and misconceptions;</li> <li>• Prepare students to undertake independent work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model activities, write directions on the board, teach classroom routines that are used consistently, provide visual cues, use analogies, explain idioms</li> <li>• Prepare multiple ways of explaining/teaching difficult concepts</li> <li>• Provide enough wait-time to allow students to process new knowledge</li> </ul>
C.	Teach students to use literacy strategies: to visualize, determine importance, predict, question, infer, make connections and analyze text.	Ex: Identify the important messages in a story; predict the ending of a story based on the beginning; make connections between a new text and one that was read previously; visualize the plot, setting and action of a text while reading
D.	Teach students to use the skill of metacognition: matching thinking and problem-solving strategies to particular situations, clarifying purposes for learning, monitoring one's comprehension, taking corrective action if understanding fails.	Ex: Notice how you figured out a difficult math problem (which strategies you used); notice patterns in difficulties you have when reading (your mind wanders, too many words you don't know, difficulty determining importance); make a plan to write an essay; notice, and ask questions about, any confusion you have when reading the story; use research tools (dictionary, internet, thesaurus, classroom materials) to fill in gaps you notice you have
E.	Teach students the skills of higher-order thinking: analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creation.	Ex: Create an alternate, believable ending to a story; create a set of criteria to assess the quality of a piece of your writing; ask students to apply the literacy strategies to a text from the Regents; analyze the author's intention in a text
	<b>STUDENTS INVESTIGATE NEW KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS (THE MIDDLE 50-60% OF THE LESSON)</b>	
A.	Design a range of activities and projects that provide opportunities for students to • clarify confusion • explore the objective; • explore their own questions and interests; • think at high levels; • make their own meaning of new info; • use new info & knowledge in new ways	This is another opportunity for differentiating instruction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading using the literacy strategies to make meaning: questioning a text, visualizing, identifying important ideas, messages and events, etc.</li> <li>• Written narratives and analytic essays about one's reading</li> <li>• Reading and writing for the workplace: business letters and reports, instructional manuals, etc.</li> <li>• Ex: Internet research, computer simulations, designing models, labs</li> </ul>
B.	Require collaboration and interaction: Students should practice and apply their new knowledge in lots of different configurations: • small, flexible, hetero- and homogeneous groups; • teacher: student conferences, student: student paired work; • and independent work	Ex: Reading groups, investigation and experiments, learning journals, discussion, role-plays, interviews, teacher-student "conferences", reciprocal-teaching, presentations, small group work, partnered work, think-pair share
C.	Ensure student understanding: As students work with each	Conferences provide teachers with an opportunity to:



	<p>other, the teacher conferences with students. The conferences are designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clarify confusion;</li> <li>• provide guidance, either to extend student learning, or to fill in gaps;</li> <li>• assess students' understanding of the objective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiate: engaging different students in different types of conversations about the material, based on both their understanding and their interests;</li> <li>• Collect data on students' understanding of the material;</li> <li>• Support students' building of the skill of metacognition, by working with them to try different approaches to a challenging task</li> </ul>
	<p>SYNTHESIZE NEW LEARNING (THE FINAL 20% OF THE LESSON)</p>	
A.	<p>Provide opportunities for students to show their understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Objective</li> <li>• How to use the learning strategies to tackle challenging tasks:</li> <li>• how they learned the goals</li> <li>• their higher order thinking skills;</li> <li>• their application of the literacy strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the "L" on a K-W-L chart</li> <li>• Written reflections, "</li> <li>• Dip-sticking,"</li> <li>• Whole group sharing</li> <li>• Student sharing of the work they completed during the <b>practice and application</b> time</li> </ul>
B.	<p>Develop tools that provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers with ways to keep track of student understanding, and</li> <li>• students with consistent feedback, regarding their learning of objectives as well as the learning strategies.</li> </ul>	<p>Ex. of in-the-moment assessments: teacher tracking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conference notes</li> <li>• spreadsheet student evidence:</li> <li>• Student-generated questions and responses: both higher and lower-order</li> <li>• student-generated lists</li> <li>• student descriptions of the strategies they used, and why</li> <li>• quizzes</li> <li>• "ticket-to-leave"</li> </ul>
	<p>TEACHER REFLECTION ON THE LESSON</p>	
	<p>Throughout the process of designing and teaching lessons, teachers should engage in a reflective practice designed to support them in their efforts to develop as professionals. This involves using the same skill of metacognition and collaboration/interaction teachers have taught their students. Teachers would never explore all of these questions at the close of a lesson, but rather, would focus on questions that related to their particular focus at a given time.</p>	<p>Questions for reflection: lesson preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did my lesson have clear objectives that promoted analysis, evaluation and synthesis?</li> </ul> <p>Mini-lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did I introduce the learning strategies?</li> <li>• How well did I activate prior knowledge?</li> <li>• Did I provide new information?</li> <li>• How well did I link new learning with what they already know?</li> <li>• Did I introduce difficult vocabulary so students weren't frustrated when they came across it?</li> <li>• Did I continuously check for student understanding?</li> </ul> <p>Practice and application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were students able to undertake independent work (did I scaffold the activities well enough)?</li> <li>• Did students interact with one another often and effectively?</li> <li>• Did I give students an opportunity to apply the strategies they just learned?</li> <li>• Did I provide activities that integrated reading, writing, listening, and speaking?</li> <li>• Did some part of the independent work require analysis, evaluation and synthesis?</li> <li>• What ideas and issues did I explore in my conferences?</li> </ul> <p>Assessment and reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did I ask students to discuss their metacognition?</li> <li>• During my conferences, did I keep track of students' levels of understanding, to inform tomorrow's planning?</li> <li>• Did I link my assessment to the objective, and did I ask students to analyze evaluation and synthesize</li> </ul>



		ideas? • What was the overall level of student understanding of the day's objective? • Which students need further instruction on the material? Lesson preparation: • How will I follow-up on this material tomorrow? • How will I address gaps in student understanding tomorrow?
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Discuss progress aligned to the school's mission-specific goals, as stated in the school's 2014-15 annual report.

Goal Statement:	Evidence of Progress toward Goal:
Increase the percentage of students demonstrating at least one grade level's growth on the STAR reading assessment.	Student growth is measured within two separate categories: The first scale score is an interpretation of a student's overall abilities, and second is student growth percentile (SGP), which is a measurement of student growth competitive to other students with in similar a demographic. In both categories, there was evidence of growth, with an average increase in scale score of 81.01 and an average SGP score of 60, which puts us in the sixth percentile of growth—well above the average of students within our demographic.
Increase the percentage of students demonstrating at least one grade level's growth on the STAR Math assessment.	Student growth is measured within two separate categories: The first scale score is an interpretation of a student's overall abilities, and second is student growth percentile (SGP), which is a measurement of student growth competitive to other students with in similar a demographic. In both categories there was evidence of growth, with an average increase in scale score of 33.98 and an average SGP score of 52.3, which puts us above the fiftieth percentile of growth well above the average of students within our demographic.
Decrease the number of students extricated from class, remanded to in-school suspension and out of school suspension.	We incorporated PBIS into the existing discipline system as a beta test for the 2014-15 school year. We eliminated our in-school suspension room and holding room and encouraged teachers to handle incidents within the classroom.

### PART 3: STEWARDSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

2. Complete Table 9.A, summarizing the school's financial health.

Table 9.A: School Financial Information			
Financial Information:	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16
Total margin (net income / total revenue)	.72%	.81%	.79%
Debt to asset ratio (total liabilities / total assets)	32.68%	31.40%	29%
Debt service coverage ratio (net income + depreciation +	N/A	N/A	N/A



interest expense) / (principal + interest payments)			
Current asset ratio (current assets / current liabilities):	95%	98%	94%
Days of unrestricted cash (unrestricted cash/ ((total expenses – depreciation expenses)/365 days))	29	30	51
Cash flow (change in cash balance)	(27,921)	183	220,149

Identify areas for growth and improvement in the school’s governance, financial systems, and core operating procedures. Discuss areas of concern and plans to address deficiencies.

At our last renewal, the SDE made a number of suggestions regarding governance. Specifically they asked for a rewrite of the school’s bylaws and their adoption by the school board

Please make the case for the school’s long-term viability over the next five years.

Our school is positioned on solid financial ground, has made significant strides toward pedagogical excellence, and continues to serve a population of students no other school wants. Our financial strength is buoyed by Domus, which functions in part as a CMO; it is as financially sound as we have ever been. We have over \$5,000,000 in reserves, have an active fundraising board, and have benefactors who are strong advocates for our mission. Our local school board has never been stronger and is growing.

With our educational partner ReDesign, whose engagement is funded by the Dalio Foundation, we have implemented solid pedagogical practices, reinforced by a strong professional development program and practice, and are confident the infrastructure is in place to move our students academically.

#### PART 4: STUDENT POPULATION

- Complete Table 12.A, summarizing the school’s demographics, enrollment, and three-year growth projections. Demographic data should reflect the school’s 2016-17 student population.

Table 12.A: Charter School Enrollment and Demographic Information															
School Year:	Actual Enrollment:														
	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
2014-15								32	51	64					147
2015-16								34	42	58					134
2016-17								54	40	40					134
School Year:	Growth Projections:														
	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
2017-18								55	55	40					150
2018-19								55	55	55					165
2015-16 Student Demographic Information:															
Majority sending city/district:											Stamford				
Percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals:											92%				
Percentage of special education students:											32%				



Percentage of students with limited English proficiency:	2%
Percentage of Asian students:	1%
Percentage of Black students:	49%
Percentage of Hispanic students:	47%
Percentage of Caucasian students:	1%

If applicable, provide a rationale for the proposed expansion outlined in Table 12.A.

N/A

Summarize the school’s efforts to attract, enroll, and retain special populations. Explain how the school’s demographics reflect that of the target population and/or the communities the school seeks to serve. Provide evidence to substantiate the school’s ability to effectively serve low-income students, students with disabilities, and ELs.

Our school services the state’s most high-risk middle schoolers. With our parent organization Domus, we continue to provide wrap-around services to our community and our families, who are very impoverished (over 90%), are families of color (98%), often immigrants (over 40%). We also serve a population of special education students nearly triple that of the LEA (35% of Trailblazers students are special education identified).

Complete Table 15.A, providing student mobility information for the past three school years.

<b>Table 15.A: Student Mobility Information</b>			
<b>Mobility Data:</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>
Number of students who left during the school year	8	10	10
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next school year and had not completed the highest grade at the school	23	9	4

Complete Table 16.A, summarizing demand and community support for the charter school. Explain how the charter school is increasing educational opportunities and equity for the students it seeks to serve. Provide information regarding the school’s attrition rate (i.e., the number of students leaving the school during the school year) and how the school seeks to decrease attrition.

<b>Table 16.A: Waitlist Information</b>		
<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
6	0	0