



Oakland Unified School District

Charter School Renewal Quality Review Handbook

May 2010

A Quality Review Program Developed for Charter Renewal



Introduction and Background

The Charter Schools Act of 1992 provides opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure as a method to:

- improve pupil learning;
- increase learning opportunities for all pupils;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- create professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;
- provide expanded choices in the types of opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
- hold schools accountable for meeting measurable pupil outcomes.

The act was intended to stimulate continual improvement in all public schools and create school-centered, performance-based accountability within the public school system.

The “license to dream” provided by the charter law subsequently led to the establishment of hundreds of charter schools in the state. Today, over a decade later, California’s charter schools reflect a variety of educational visions, pedagogical approaches, student populations, and organizational designs, which make them uniquely varied and complex.

From the moment a charter school petition is approved, its leaders enter into a pact, providing accountability for high student achievement in exchange for autonomy from onerous state regulations and requirements. In order to meet its obligation to provide thorough, responsible oversight of the charter schools it authorizes, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has created a Charter School Renewal Protocol (Appendix I) that sets high standards for charter schools serving students in Oakland.

The Oakland Unified School District, has developed the *Charter School Renewal Quality Review* (CSRQR) to help inform OUSD’s decision for renewal in these three performance areas:

1. Is the school an **Academic Success?**
2. Is the school an **Effective, Viable Organization?**
3. Has the school been **Faithful to the Terms of its Charter?**

The CSRQR process will assist the charter schools authorized by Oakland Unified School District in ensuring that high expectations, strong teaching practices, supportive learning environments and fiscal responsibility are carefully and thoughtfully aligned and carried out.

This *Charter School Renewal Quality Review* (CSRQR) Handbook serves two main purposes:

1. To clarify the Review Process for charter school leaders.
2. To provide a comprehensive reference for visiting Renewal School Review Teams.

Program Review as Part of the Charter School Renewal Process

Purpose of the Charter School Renewal Quality Review

The CSRQR has been developed to assist the Oakland Unified School District in improving the quality of education provided by its charter schools and to focus on raising educational standards and maintaining operational integrity.

It is designed as an evaluation of a charter school's progress in meeting a defined set of standards over the course of the charter term. The process also provides:

- additional qualitative and quantitative information upon which charter renewal decisions will be made;
- a structured opportunity for program review;
- an opportunity for the school to engage in self-evaluation and to assess its own progress towards meeting schoolwide performance goals; and
- a springboard for school improvement planning.

CSRQR is both a District-level and an independent process that has been approved by the Oakland Unified School District as an on-site quality review process for purposes of assessing the quality of a charter school's program for renewal. The results of this on-site review process is ONE aspect of consideration for charter renewal. The Oakland Unified School District Board of Education has sole authority in any decisions related to the renewal or non-renewal of a charter school.

Role of Self-Evaluation in Preparation for Charter Renewal

When school evaluation is set within a culture of self-reflection, analysis of results and action, it becomes a very powerful tool for helping a school to maintain and develop a well-founded improvement program. Evaluation of the quality of the school's leadership and the support for improvement is an integral part of the review process. The school's capacity to succeed is highly dependent on the leadership's vision of the school, its ability to be reflective, and its willingness to make adaptations for the sake of school improvement. One of the questions this review asks is:

How well does the school know itself and how effectively can the leadership evaluate the quality of the work it undertakes?

One of the components of the quality site visit will be to assess how well the school has prepared for renewal and the extent to which it has established a system in place for:

- holding itself accountable for its attainment of **academic success**, its **operational viability**, and its **faithfulness to the terms of its charter**;
- identifying strengths and weaknesses in key areas of the school's work;
- allowing for a formal opportunity for the school to self evaluate alongside an external evaluation;

The highly effective tools of school self-evaluation and external review can be used as part of an on-going process to identify priorities for improvement, monitor program delivery and evaluate outcomes.

What Are the Reviewers Looking For?

Consistent with the Oakland Unified School District Charter Renewal Protocol, the purpose of the CSRQR at the time of charter renewal is to corroborate the information set forth in the renewal application submitted by the school, as well as provide significant qualitative data to assist in the overall evaluation of the renewal request. To minimize the burden of administrators and staff, almost all of the documentation requested in the review will be drawn from materials already required for charter school operations and the school's application for renewal. Attention has been paid to consider alignment of required documentation with other school review processes such as WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) to further minimize the burden on site-based staff as the school undergoes renewal.

The focus of the school review will be on the systems and processes the school has implemented for its instructional program and support for student learning, its use of data in raising student achievement as well as the effectiveness of its leadership and governance structures and the integrity of its fiscal operations.

The Review Team will assist in answering the following overarching renewal questions:

- **Is the school an Academic Success?**
- **Is the school an Effective, Viable Organization?**
- **Has the school been Faithful to the Terms of its Charter?**
- **What is the school's Plan for a Future Charter Term?**

The following Key Questions will also be addressed through classroom observations, focus group interviews with stakeholders (school leadership, teachers, staff, governing board, students, teachers, parents and family members and business and community partners):

1. How does the school work towards meeting its mission?
2. In what ways do the school leadership and staff evaluate their performance and the overall performance of the school?
3. What is the quality of teaching and how has it impacted student academic achievement?
4. What strategies and factors does the school use to contribute to its success?
5. How effective is the leadership and governance structure in supporting the academic, operational and organizational aspects of the school?
6. Has the school met or made substantial progress towards meeting the standards outlined in the OUSD Charter Renewal Protocol?

Oakland Unified School District

Site Review Evaluation Criteria for Charter Renewal

The quality review site-visit evaluation criteria are the same for all schools seeking renewal. The following site review criteria and areas of guidance are aligned with the *Quality Standards for Charter School Operations* developed by the California Charter School Association. These standards are currently being used by CCSA to certify schools: It is important to note that the standards developed by CCSA are the product of work conducted in collaboration with charter leaders throughout the state of California and represent a measure by which charter school operators have sought to hold themselves accountable.

Is the School an Academic Success?

Criteria 1: Improving Student Achievement

A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards and closing achievement gaps of students.

Criteria 2: Strong Leadership

The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.

Criteria 3: A Focus on Continuous Improvement

A charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Criteria 4: Responsible Governance

A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.

Criteria 5: Fiscal Accountability

A charter school fulfils its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school conducts an annual financial audit which is made public.

Making Consistent Judgments

In the complex context of school review it is important that the terminology used is clearly understood by everyone concerned. It is also imperative that everyone recognizes that there are many ways in which a school's program for improving student outcomes can merit a particular evaluation and that awarding levels is a matter of informed professional judgment and not simply a technical process. The following rubric is included to assist reviewers in making consistent judgments.

- An evaluation of **(5)** applies to schools characterized, overall, by strengths. There are very few or no weaknesses, and any that exist do not diminish the students' experience. Although an evaluation of **(5)** represents a high standard of quality, it is a standard that is achievable by all schools. It implies that the school may appropriately continue its work without significant adjustment, and that there is compelling evidence that this program can be sustained at a high level. However, all schools are expected to continue to take advantage of all opportunities to improve. The Quality Indicator (QI) for this element is ***excellent***.
- An evaluation of **(4)** applies to schools where efforts to improve student achievement are characterized by a number of strengths. There are a few weaknesses, but neither singly nor collectively, do these have a significant adverse impact on the student experience. An evaluation of **(4)** may be appropriate in circumstances where the organization may make for a productive student experience; but it may not apply consistently to some students. There is strong evidence that this element can be sustained at a level that positively impacts student experiences. Typically, the school's academic improvement practices will be characterized by strengths but one or more weaknesses will reduce the overall quality of the practices. The Quality Indicator (QI) for this element is ***proficient***.
- An evaluation of **(3)** applies to schools characterized by some strengths, but where some important weaknesses have an impact on the quality of students' experiences. In general, an evaluation of **(3)** will imply the need for structured and timed action on the part of the school. It may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. There may be some of strengths, but there will also be weaknesses which will be, either individually or collectively, sufficient to diminish the student experience in significant ways. There may be an overall lack of evidence that this program can be sustained or implemented by the school at a level to positively impact student experiences. The QI for the element provided is ***underdeveloped***.
- An evaluation of **(2)** applies to schools where the program is characterized by weaknesses that require immediate and significant corrective action by the school. Some, if not all, staff responsible for improving student achievement require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out necessary actions to enhance the effectiveness of the school's efforts to improve student outcomes. There are a few strengths but these are overshadowed by the impact of the weaknesses. There is little evidence that this program can be sustained or implemented by the school at a level to positively impact student experiences. The Quality Indicator (QI) for this element is ***inadequate***.
- An evaluation of **(1)** applies when there are major weaknesses in the program, requiring immediate remedial action on the part of the school. The student experience is at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for a program that is evaluated ***unsatisfactory*** will require significant support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside effective peers in or beyond the school. There is no evidence that this program can be sustained or implemented by the school to positively impact student experiences. The Quality Indicator (QI) for this element is ***unsatisfactory***.

The Charter School Renewal Quality Review (CSRQR) Process

Overview

The District will appoint 1-3 reviewers, depending on the size of the school. The lead reviewer, for each team, will have experience and expertise in evaluating charter schools.

The lead reviewer will liaise with the school leader throughout the process to coordinate all schedules, logistics, and pre-visit planning and preparation.

The program review commences with the school completing a short self-evaluation form (Appendix 4) and providing as much background information as possible. The lead reviewer will collect this information (which provides a contextual background for the site-visit) and share this with the other team members.

The team visits the school for 2-3 days: collecting first-hand evidence, validating evidence, and reaching preliminary conclusions. Throughout the visit, the team will work on summarizing the evidence collected into main findings.

Following the visit, the lead reviewer is responsible for collating a written report which includes findings supported by evidence collected from qualitative and quantitative evidence collected during the visit, evidence documented over the term of the school's charter (previous site visit reports, annual reports, and student academic achievement results) as well as scores against the assessment rubric.

Stages of the Review Process

The Quality Site Review consists of three parts:

- Pre-visit Preparation
- The School Site Visit
- Final Report

Pre-visit Preparation

Experience has shown that thorough preparation is essential in order to provide the full value of a program review for the evaluative purposes of charter renewal consideration. It is helpful if both teams – both the school and the review team - support each other in their shared task of providing a thorough evaluation of the school. The review team members need to develop a solid understanding of the school in order to make a valid assessment.

Additionally, when the charter school leader has a thorough understanding of the process and its purposes, he/she is better equipped to ensure that the preparation time is beneficial to the school and staff. For example, if teachers are given clear expectations, they will be well prepared, less apprehensive and more able to utilize the process as an opportunity for personal and professional development.

Roles and Responsibilities During Pre-Visit Preparation

The School

- Send the completed *School Self-Evaluation Form* (SSEF) in Appendix 4 of this handbook, electronically, to the Lead Reviewer no later than two weeks before the visit*
- Form representative focus groups of teachers, board members, parents and students to meet with the team at the scheduled times
- Inform administrators, board members, district administration and teachers of their meeting times with the review team
- Arrange for samples of student work/portfolios to be made available during the visit
- Arrange to have a room where 2-4 members can work on computers and confer privately
- It would be helpful to have refreshments (coffee, water, etc.) available during the entire visit

Lead Reviewer

- Coordinates the review team
- Contacts school to be sure of schedule and final arrangements
- Review the school's completed SSEF and collect preliminary information on the school
- Brief review team on the visit schedule and preliminary school information gathered

** At least two weeks before the review, the charter school leadership completes the School's Self Evaluation Form (SEF). This is a very important part of the process because when completed thoughtfully and thoroughly, it not only helps the review team to understand the school, but also provides an insight into how well the school evaluates its own work and effectiveness.*

The School Site-Visit

During the two-day site-visit, the lead reviewer and the team will aim to get to know as much about the school as possible in the time available.

The Review Team follows an intensive daily schedule during which it collects evidence through observation of teaching and learning, examination of student work and discussion with teachers, students, parents and other members of the school community. It is this first-hand evidence, coupled with the evidence gathered at pre-review which provides the team with a thorough understanding of the school's program and operations and of the quality therein.

Observing lessons

A significant amount of time is spent observing how well students learn as a result of the instruction they receive. This is the *cornerstone activity* in making the evaluation of "how well the school meets its goals and objectives" under the Cambridge review process.

Meeting with teachers, parents, students and board members

In consultation with the school, Reviewers will meet with school staff, parents, students and board members who often provide valuable insight into the quality of education provided at the school.

Reviewing student work

Reviewers will ask teachers for examples of students' work, as well as curriculum documents such as scope and sequence, records of internal assessment and results in external tests and examinations. The school may offer other relevant measures or indicators of attainment and progress towards meeting the renewal criteria in order to demonstrate achievement.

End of the day check-in and report-out

Reviewers will have an informal check-in and report-out meeting with the school principal and/or leadership team at the end of the first day to present preliminary findings and a more formal report-out session at the end of the second day. There may also be times when the lead reviewer will check-in with the principal to clarify questions that may arise during the review.

DAY ONE: Sample Site Visit Schedule with up to three reviewers*

Schedule	Day 1	Day 2
7:30 – 8:00	Team Meeting: Orientation in the process / meet with School Leader	
8:00 – 9:00	Meet with Board of Trustees	Parent Focus Group
9:00 – 9.45	Class visits	Class visits
9.45 – 10.30	Meet with Administration	Additional Fact Finding
10.30 – 11.15	Class Visits	Class Visits
11:15 – 12:00	Student Focus Group	Class Visits
12:00 – 1.00	Lunch with Teachers	Lunch with Students
1.00– 1:30	Review of students’ work	Team Work Time
1.30– 2.00	Initial Team Discussion	
2.00 – 2:45	Additional Fact Finding	Presentation of preliminary findings to School Leaders
2:45 – 3:30	Team Work Time	OUSD Staff ONLY Document Review
3.30 – 3.45	Observe end of school	
3:45- 4:15	Observe any extra curricular activities	
4.15 – 6.00	Team Work Time	

** The above should only be seen as indicative of the range of activities that will take place during the site-visit. Prior to the visit the principal and the assessor, through phone and email correspondence, will agree on the exact details of the review visit.*

DAY TWO

On the second day of the visit, the Review Team will assemble its findings in the form of a report responding to the Key Questions in the renewal process including findings supported by evidence collected from qualitative and quantitative evidence collected during the visit, evidence documented over the term of the school’s charter (previous site visit reports, annual reports, and student academic achievement results) as well as scores against the assessment rubric. .

School leaders should be available to assist with questions the review team may have during the report-writing process. The team may also use the second day to undertake additional fact finding.

On the afternoon of the second day of the site-visit, typically between 2:30-3:00 pm, the lead reviewer and team members provide a verbal report-out to the school leader(s) and the chair of the school governing board. The lead reviewer will present the meeting with a summary of the main review findings/key issues that the team has drafted.

If there has been effective communication during the review process and if the school is reflective and self-critical in its approach to the evaluation, it is unlikely that the report-out will contain any surprises.

It is always suggested that the School Leader has others from their team and/or members of the board present to share the key findings with him/her.

Schedule	Day 3
9:30 – 10.00	OUSD Staff ONLY Meet with Administration
10.00 – 10.30	OUSD Staff ONLY Class visits
10.30 – 11.00	OUSD Staff ONLY Document Review
11:30 – 12:00	

Final Report and Recommendation for Charter School Renewal or Non-Renewal

The on-site feedback is followed by a full report. This will be completed and a first draft will be sent to the school within 20 calendar days.

The lead reviewer has responsibility for ensuring that the report is consistent and derived from the evidence collected during the visit. The full report will be more detailed than the initial overview shared with the school; it will contain findings for each key area with linked supporting evidence found during the review.

A copy of the final report will be sent to the Oakland Unified School District. The Office of Charter Schools at OUSD will send the final copy of the report as well as the accompanying Board of Education materials to the Board Secretary to become public record.

The results of this on-site review process is ONE aspect of consideration for charter renewal. The Oakland Unified School District Board of Education has sole authority in any decisions related to the renewal or non-renewal of a charter school.