BALTIMORE CITY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Operator Renewal Report

The Crossroads School #323

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REPORT INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Report

The renewal recommendation report is a summary of findings regarding renewal of the charter or contract for an operator-run school, and the resulting renewal recommendation. Baltimore City Public Schools ("City Schools") collects and analyzes documentation including the school's renewal application, and an evaluation of the school's performance based on the renewal rubric, the School Effectiveness Review ("SER") performed on site at each school, the 5Essentials Student and Teacher Survey Report, and consideration of all other relevant information.

City Schools' renewal criteria are based on state law (§ 9-101, *et seq*., MD. CODE ANN., EDUC.) and Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners ("Board"), Policy IHBJ and associated administrative regulations (IHBJ-RA and JFA-RA). Board Policy IHBJ requires that schools up for renewal be evaluated on multiple measures including, but not limited to, the following:

- **Student achievement** (performance on state assessments, growth measures/value added measures, unique indicators, academic programming for special student populations and a school's fidelity to its charter or contract)
- **School climate** (chronic absence, suspensions, enrollment trends, school choice data, and school survey results)
- **Financial management and governance** (annual audits, school budget submissions, grants management, board documentation; compliance/adherence with federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations)
- An overall finding of not effective in any of the key areas (Student Achievement, School Climate, or Financial Management/Governance) may be the basis of a non-renewal decision.

The renewal process is a component of City Schools' annual review of its schools, designed to ensure that students and families across the district have access to school options that meet their interests and needs. The framework was originally developed in 2011 by the Renewal Stakeholders Working Group (composed of school operators from a range of school types, Supporting Public Schools of Choice, the Maryland Charter School Network, and district staff) who worked to develop a methodology for evaluating the performance of operator-run schools. The result: a fair, transparent, and rigorous renewal framework that reflects schools' unique nature and innovative contributions to student achievement, used for the first time in the 2012-13 school year, and a process for reviewing and updating the framework each year.

At the conclusion of each year's renewal cycle, staff engages operators and other key stakeholders in a review of the process to identify areas for improvement that could be addressed while still maintaining a level of predictability for schools up for renewal in the following year. The most recent round of review considered the transition from the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers ("PARCC") to the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program ("MCAP"), as well as the lack of state assessment data for school years 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Key changes made to the framework as a result of this most recent review include the following:

- The timeline of the renewal process has been extended so that 2021-22 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) scores could be considered prior to renewal recommendations being made. MCAP scores were released by the Maryland State Department of Education ("MSDE") in January 2023. MCAP data is considered in three metrics used in the renewal rubric:
    - Absolute Student Achievement
    - Effective Programming for All Student Racial and Ethnic Groups
    - Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities

  MCAP Update (February 2023): The 2021-22 school year was the first administration of MCAP, the state's new assessments for ELA and Math. The majority of schools in Baltimore City performed similarly on these assessments with the average students performing at a level 2 for ELA assessments in grades 3-5, 6-8 and English 10, indicating that students demonstrate partial proficiency in this subject and need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level.

  For math, City Schools, like Maryland and school districts across the country, experienced decreases between 2019 and 2022, and the average performance level for Baltimore City students is a level 2 for Math assessments for grades 3-5, and level 1 for Math assessments in grades 6-8. Performance level 1indicates students do not yet demonstrate proficiency in the subject and need substantial academic supports to be prepared for the next grade level. For Algebra I, results were an equal mix of level 1 and 2.

  Additionally, for both ELA and math assessments, many schools' performance was so similar that the level of differentiation that allowed for ranking each school using percentile comparisons within an economic disadvantage group to determine ratings, as City Schools historically has done in operator renewal, was not possible. In some cases, if using percentile rankings, the difference between schools rated Effective and Not Effective in an MCAP absolute measure would be a difference of only two points in mean scale score, meaning schools with similar performance would receive very different ratings.

  In order to address the lack of differentiation evident in the data, for the current renewal process City Schools has adopted ratings for the MCAP absolute measure identifying schools as "Developing" when their average student performance level averages to a 2 or below, and "Effective" when the student performance level averages 3. Ratings of "Highly Effective" and "Not Effective" for MCAP Absolute will not be given in this year's renewal process.

- Trend in Student Achievement, along with Absolute and Growth data, is one of three ways assessment data is used in the renewal rubric. Because of the transition to MCAP, trend data is not available for use in this year's renewal process. The weight of this measure has been redistributed to other measures in the Academics section of the renewal rubric.

- The 5Essentials survey of students and instructional staff has been added to the renewal review in the Academic section of the rubric. This addition helps to reduce the weight on assessment measures considered in this section while providing valuable insights on school organization. The 5Essentials is a research-backed diagnostic survey administered to instructional staff and students that identifies five indicators that lead to improved

outcomes for all students, including improved attendance, graduation rates, freshman on track and larger test score gains.[1] The five indicators are:

- Effective Leaders
- Collaborative Teachers
- Involved Families
- Supportive Environments
- Ambitious Instruction

"Research shows schools strong on at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to show substantial gains in student learning than schools weak on three or more of the five essentials. A low score in even just one of the five essentials reduced the likelihood of improvement to less than 10 percent."[2] Use of the 5Essentials in the renewal process gives Advisory Board reviewers, district leadership, the Board of School Commissioners, schools, and the public additional insight into how schools are organizing themselves for improvement in delivering high quality instruction to students.

The Terms

According to Board Policy IHBJ, City Schools may determine that a public charter school is eligible for an eight-year contract term, five-year contract term, three-year contract term, or nonrenewal. The eight-year renewal term is an option based on the updated Board Policy IHBJ. Board Policy IHBJ allows the Board to consider an eight-year term for schools that have "two or more consecutive full renewals, including demonstrating quality programming for all student groups" and that have met the standard for a five-year renewal in the year of the latest review. A non-renewal recommendation in most cases includes a decision to close the program.

The Process

The process uses the following components:

- Renewal Rubric (Updated to reflect the above changes)
- Application for Renewal
- Data Tables prepared by City Schools
- School Effectiveness Review
- 5Essentials Survey Report

The process starts with a review by the Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board ("Advisory Board"), whose members represent foundations, nonprofit organizations, school choice advocates, school operators, and district representatives; and whose function is to provide advice to the CEO on renewal and other issues as they relate to operator-led schools. In performing its review, the Advisory Board looks at all data and information, both quantitative and qualitative, to assess strengths and weaknesses of each school program and make sound recommendations to the CEO.

[1] https://www.uchicagoimpact.org/sites/default/files/5EOnePager_Nov2019.pdf

[2] https://www.uchicagoimpact.org/our-offerings/5essentials

The CEO considers the recommendations and the quantitative and qualitative review of the Advisory Board, and then through administrative review, makes her recommendation to the Board. In some instances, the nature or severity of an issue raised during the renewal process is serious enough to give it extra weight in formulating the renewal recommendation and, ultimately, the renewal decision, especially in instances where the issue affects the wellbeing of students, staff, or the district as a whole. For the Financial Management/Governance section, a rating of not effective in any one of the three elements that make up that section can result in a rating of not effective for the entire section depending on the severity of the concerns.

The ultimate decision on all operator renewals rests with the Board, which considers the recommendations and rationale of the CEO, the operator renewal report, testimony given at public Board meetings and work sessions, the contents of the official record, and the factors listed in Board Policy IHBJ and Administrative Regulation IHBJ-RA for all operator-led schools and Policy FCA and Administrative Regulation FCA-RA for non-charter schools. This includes the Board's ability to consider prior partial renewal terms afforded to operators who have had serious challenges in the prior renewal that remain issues that continue to affect the wellbeing of students, staff, or the district as a whole, based on evidence in this renewal process. In particular, as Board Policy IHBJ states, "[t]he Board may decide that a public charter school is not eligible for two consecutive partial renewals."

Timeline

Actions	**Date**
Renewal application due from operators	September 1, 2022
Charter and Operator-led Schools Advisory Board reviews renewal applications and provides advice to the CEO on renewal recommendations	September to October 2022, January 2023
District presents preliminary findings of strengths and weaknesses to Board at public meeting	November 9, 2022
MSDE releases 2021-22 MCAP results	January 2023
Schools receive data on measures that consider MCAP results, including Absolute performance, and submit addendum addressing MCAP results	January-February 2023
Schools receive CEO's renewal recommendation	February 2023
Renewal recommendations presented to Board	February 14, 2023
Work Session providing operators the opportunity to provide oral testimony to Board in a meeting open to the public	February 16, 2023
Board vote on renewal recommendations; Board deferred vote on one recommendation for further consideration	February 23, 2023
Board vote on deferred recommendation	February 28, 2023

The Crossroads School #323

Operator: Living Classrooms, Inc.
Configuration: Middle
Type: Charter
Enrollment: 162[3]

Recommendation

8-year renewal

Discussion

On February 23, 2023, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to renew the contract with Living Classrooms, Inc. to operate The Crossroads School for an eight-year term running from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2031. The School was rated "Effective" in Academics, Climate, and Financial Management/Governance.

The Crossroads School was rated "Effective" in Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall, indicating that the school's mission "to create the space for children to evolve as individuals and as a community through urgency, rigor, expectations, and kindness" is *clear to most stakeholders*[4]. This mission is evident in the school's project-based and service learning programming, which gives students interactive learning environments and allows them to engage creatively with subjects as they connect their learning to projects in the surrounding community. The operator ensures the school has *made a good to fair effort to gather data to assess its efficacy and has implemented effective strategies to address any challenges evident in the data*. The school utilizes a data cycle that starts with daily collaboration between teachers and the school's leadership team to monitor student progress using both quantitative and qualitative data and information, and guide instruction on an individual student basis. In the longer term, data is used to adjust curriculum, inform professional development and set school-wide goals. Using this process, the school has made adjustments over the course of the contract to its math program, where it has expanded access to pre-algebra for 7th graders and algebra I for 8th grade students with assistance from its partner, Baltimore Algebra Project, adopted new history programming, and had its in-house science curriculum approved for recognition as honors programming by the district. The school was rated "Highly Effective" in the 5E survey of students and faculty, indicating it is well organized for improvement in the future. Research has consistently shown that schools strong on at least three of the 5Essentials are 10 times more likely to show substantial gains in student learning than schools weak on three or more of the five essentials.

The school was rated "Highly Effective" in PARCC growth for math grades for grades 6-8 placing in the 89th percentile and "Developing" in PARCC growth for English/Language Arts (ELA) for grades 6-8 placing in 57th percentile. The student growth percentile looks at the extent to which a school can improve individual student performance year to year for school years 2017-18 to 2018-19.

[3] Final 9/30 enrollment counts for 2022-23.
[4] Text in italics is quoted from the 2022-23 operator renewal rubric.

2021-22 was the first year that the state's new assessment, the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) was administered. The school is rated "Developing" in both MCAP ELA for grades 6-8 and math for grades 6-8. The school's average student performance in each test was level 2, indicating that students demonstrated partial proficiency and need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness. This performance is similar to other schools in the district in these assessments.

In the Effective Programming for All Student Racial and Ethnic Groups, the school was rated "Developing", as *the school is making progress in delivering quality programming for all student racial groups… and the school has implemented some instructional approaches, processes and practices that the school believes will decrease gaps*. The school utilizes rigorous curriculum that provides appropriate, grade level instruction to students with a focus on Honors and advanced math courses. The school attempts to celebrate student cultures through lessons, field trips, enrichment clubs and other activities. However, in some instances, the school's choice of materials and activities meant to celebrate student culture were not appropriate. The operator must take greater care in the future to ensure that its materials and approach do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes and is more sensitive to the experiences of its students. A focus on intentional methods of centering the history and culture of its student body beyond oppression is needed; the school and operator must work to uncover biases within the school community that can negatively impact instruction, student experiences and the school environment.

Crossroads is rated highly in many areas of school climate, including Student Attendance: Chronic Absence, were it was rated "Effective", indicating *the school is aware of its chronic absence data, has processes in place to identify root causes and provide supports to families and has implemented effective strategies that have decreased chronic absence rates*. Crossroads sets high goals for attendance, recognizing and rewarding students with perfect attendance, and communications to families about the importance of regular attendance through quarterly meetings and enhanced outreach to families of students who have attendance difficulties. These strategies have led to higher attendance and lower chronic absence than students at other schools in the grade band. Crossroads was rated "Effective" in the Family Survey and "Highly Effective" in Cohort Retention, a measure which looks at the rate of students staying at a school at least two years after initial entry. These metrics show satisfaction with the school among families and students.

However, the school was rated "Developing" in Suspensions, indicating the school has positive behavior interventions in place, and *has implemented strategies that the school believes will decrease suspensions, but these strategies have not yet proven effective*. The school's approaches to behavior, such as restorative practices, support of counselors and social workers, and engagement of families and staff to support students, are promising, suspension rates at the school are above the district average with no clear trend of improvement.

Findings (Middle school rubric)

Category 1. Is the school an academic success?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
1.1 Absolute Student Achievement	Average Student Performance Level MCAP Math (grades 6-8)	**Developing**
	Average Student Performance Level MCAP ELA (grades 6-8)	**Developing**
1.2 Student Achievement Growth	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC Math (grades 6-8)	**Highly Effective**
	Growth in Average Mean Scale Score PARCC ELA (grades 6-8)	**Developing**
1.3 Fidelity to Charter/Application Overall	The extent to which the school has fully implemented the mission expressed in its charter application and this mission is clear to all stakeholders. The extent to which the school has delivered high quality programming for all student subgroups. The extent to which the school is gathering data to assess its efficacy and has effectively addressed any challenges evident in the data, particularly in the areas of subgroup performance, enrollment, student attendance, dropout rates, attrition and student choice data/school demand.	**Effective**
1.4 Effective Programming for All Student Racial/Ethnic Groups	The extent to which the school has provided high quality programming for students in all racial/ethnic groups. The extent to which the school has instructional approaches, processes and practices in place that seek to ensure students in all groups achieve and to address gaps in achievement between student groups.	**Developing**
1.4 5Essentials Student and Teacher Survey	The extent to which the school is organized for improvement	**Highly Effective**
Academics Overall		**Effective**

Category 2. Does the school have a strong school climate?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
2.1 SER, Highly Effective Instruction	School Effectiveness Review Score - Highly Effective Instruction	**Effective**
2.2 SER, Talented People	School Effectiveness Review Score - Talented People	**Effective**
2.3 SER, Vision and Engagement	School Effectiveness Review Score - Vision and Engagement	**Highly Effective**
2.4 Family Survey	Family: School Survey Family Satisfaction Rating	**Effective**
2.5 Cohort Retention	Cohort Retention Rating	**Highly Effective**
2.6 Student Attendance, Chronic Absence	The extent to which the school has implemented effective strategies that have kept student attendance high and chronic absences low or led to significant decreases in chronic absence over the course of the contract.	**Effective**
2.7 Suspensions	The extent to which the school has implemented effective strategies that have kept suspensions low or led to significant decreases over the course of the contract.	**Developing**
2.8 Effective Programming for Students with Disabilities	The extent to which the school has a demonstrated a strong trajectory of growth, is aware of its data and responsibilities to students with disabilities, does not have any gaps or has decreased gaps in the data as it relates to performance and climate metrics for students with disabilities over time, and has effectively and consistently implemented processes, interventions and strategies to support student outcomes over the course of the contract.	**Effective**
Climate Overall		**Effective**

Category 3. Has the school followed sufficient financial management and governance practices?

Sub-Category	Renewal Metric	City Schools Rating
3.1 Audit Content, Internal Controls	The extent to which the school's Independent Auditor's Reports offer unqualified opinions and no management points in each of the years of the charter term. The extent to which statements of cash flow and ratio of assets to liabilities indicate that the operator has strong performance on their short-term liquidity measure.	**Meets Expectations**

3.2 Operator Capacity	The extent to which the school has operated effectively, and the operator has consistently met all state, federal reporting requirements critical District or federal obligations and has not received any Notices of Concern or Notices of Reprimand during the contract period. (Evidence that may be considered includes compliance with state or federal reporting requirements, budget submissions and monitoring reports, quarterly reports, and the relative number, frequency and severity of Notices of Concern or Notices of Reprimand.)	**Effective**
3.3 SER, Strategic Leadership/Governance	School Effectiveness Review Score - Strategic Leadership	**Developing**
Financial Management/Governance Overall		**Effective**