



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



October 27, 2009

Mr. Frank Mitchell, Board President
Common Ground High School
924-6 Quinnipiac Avenue
New Haven, CT 06513

Ms. Lizanne Cox, Director
Common Ground High School
New Haven Ecology Project
358 Springside Ave.
New Haven, CT 06515

Dear Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Cox:

As discussed, the Charter School Office (CSO) will conduct a site renewal visit at the Common Ground High School on November 17, 2009, beginning at 9:30 a.m. The site renewal visit is designed to review teaching and learning, ensure compliance with the law and the charter school accountability plan, and verify responses given by the charter school on the renewal application. The renewal application is due to me no later than November 6, 2009. In preparation for the visit, I have included the following documents:

- 1) Protocol governing site renewal visits
- 2) Agenda
- 3) Checklist
- 4) List of documents
- 5) Implementation of the Charter School Renewal Process Letter

The State Appointed Renewal (SAR) team will be provided with the following documents in preparation for the site renewal visit:

- 1) Renewal application;
- 2) 2008-09 Charter School Annual Report; and
- 3) Correspondence from the CSO regarding accountability visits conducted at the charter school from its last renewal.

As you will observe in the protocol, the charter school is requested to provide a list of documents for review during the site renewal visit. Additionally, the agenda requests that the Director and Business Manager be available for the duration of the site renewal visit.

Common Ground High School Site Renewal Visit Letter

October 27, 2009

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Please fax me at (860) 713-7021, a list of faculty members and a copy of a map of the school that indicates classroom grade levels.

Once the visit is concluded, the CSO is responsible for producing a recommendation to the Commissioner of Education on charter renewal. Ultimately, the State Board of Education will vote on renewal of the charter school in the spring of 2010.

I encourage you to contact me should you have further questions regarding the site renewal visit and process for renewal. I can be reached at (860) 713-6574. Thank you for your attention to the attachments and I look forward to working with you on this process.

As a reminder, the public hearing for the renewal of the Common Ground High School will be scheduled later in the 2009-10 school year. I will work with you to determine a mutually favorable date, time and location for the hearing.

Sincerely,

Robert Kelly
Charter School Program Manager

RK:fc

xc: Mark Linabury, Bureau Chief



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Protocol Governing Site Renewal Visits for Charter Schools Up for Renewal

Purpose: Accountability is one of the cornerstones of the national charter school initiative. In Connecticut, this is especially true. Connecticut's statute and the Accountability Plan administered by the Charter School Office (CSO) requires that charter schools demonstrate their success and compliance with the law in exchange for autonomy.

The State Appointed Renewal (SAR) team will conduct renewal site visits at charter schools up for renewal. Its purpose is to provide recommendations to the Commissioner and the State Board of Education about the charter school seeking renewal. The ultimate accountability for charter schools is the renewal or non-renewal of the charter. Therefore, the work of the SAR team is vital to the process.

Method: The SAR team will divide its work into two categories: 1) review of teaching and learning; and 2) ensuring compliance with the law and the Charter School Office accountability plan.

Review of Teaching and Learning: The SAR team will review the educational model and curriculum of the charter school, speak to a variety of school stakeholders and pay special attention to how the charter school is accomplishing its mission. The SAR team will verify the responses detailed in the charter renewal application submitted to the CSO. Clarification questions emanating from the initial review of the renewal application conducted by State Department of Education staff will accompany the enclosed checklist.

Ensuring Compliance with the Law and the Charter School Accountability Plan: The SAR team will ensure that the charter school is functioning in compliance with the law. The review is based on eight areas: 1) financial management; 2) governance; 3) curriculum; 4) teaching staff; 5) enrollment and attendance; 6) facilities, equipment, books and materials; 7) special education; and 8) student assessment. The SAR team will verify responses detailed in the charter renewal applications submitted to the Charter School Office. Again, clarifying questions from the renewal application will accompany the enclosed checklist.

Guidelines

The SAR team will examine the **student, classroom, and school** in the context of the responses given by charter schools on the renewal application and the enclosed checklist. Using the questions indicated below, the SAR team will verify the responses included in the renewal application. A list of documents the charter school must provide to the SAR team at the site renewal visit is provided following the checklist. The checklist is not exhaustive. Therefore, the SAR team must note responses provided on the renewal application that do not appear on the checklist and incorporate those findings into the record. Any questions on process should be directed to the SAR team leader.

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AGENDA

- 9:30** **Introductions, Agenda, and Purpose of Visit**
9:40 **Tour of Site**
9:55 **SAR team conducts business**
- Selected SAR team members will observe teaching and learning
 - Selected SAR team members will review documents requested
- 12:00** **Meet with Faculty**
12:30 **Lunch and Team Leader Conducts Debriefing with SAR team**
1:30 **Meet with Director**
2:00 **Meet with Board**
2:30 **SAR Team Conducts Final Debriefing**
3:00 **Adjourn**

****Note:** *Director and Business Manager should be available throughout the day to assist SAR team with inquiries.*

Role and Responsibilities of SAR Team

Team Leader: Facilitates discussion; reviews documents; coordinates team members; provides logistic information to team including map of facility

SAR Team (SDE staff): Review documents; observe teaching and learning; assist in coordinating activities for outside observers

SAR Team (Outside Observers): Observe teaching and learning and participate in meetings with faculty

FOLLOW-UP

The SAR team leader will inform the team that writing conclusions about their experiences at the site renewal visit should be organized in a brief manner that includes supportable statements about their observations of teaching and learning, classroom practices, results from meetings with stakeholders, and overall conclusions regarding the learning community at the charter school.

The Team leader will remind the team that written response time is limited due to the reporting that must occur between the Charter School Office and the Commissioner's Office. Therefore, written responses will be due three business days following the site renewal visit. Responses can be sent to Robert Kelly, Charter School Manager. Fax: (860)713-7021 or e-mail: robert.kelly@ct.gov

Checklist

| FINANCIAL CONTROLS (Auditor) | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Updated general ledger? (Item #1 from List of Documents) Is the school's general ledger available and up to date? | | | | |
| Are accounting functions contracted out? If so, please indicate which. | | | | |
| Has a CPA firm been hired for auditing the school's financial statements and is a copy of most recent audit available? (#4) | | | | |
| Is an accounting manual in place and provides proper checks and balances? (#2) | | | | |
| Is there a chart of accounts? (#3) | | | | |
| Are authorization levels established for expenditures? | | | | |
| Are accounting records maintained on the accrual or modified bases? | | | | |
| Is there an established written procedure to handle daily cash receipts that provides proper separation of duties? | | | | |
| Has the school entered into any related party transactions? (#5) | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |

| ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS (Program Manager and Attorney) | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Does a current organization chart exist? (#6) | | | | |
| Are written job descriptions available for teaching and administrative staff including duties and responsibilities? (#7) | | | | |
| Are school policies and procedures documented? (#8) | | | | |
| Are teachers required to sign written teacher employment agreements? (#9) | | | | |
| Are faculty performance reviews conducted by certified staff? (#24) | | | | |
| Does the Board of Directors formally evaluate the performance of the school director/ principal on an annual basis? (#24) | | | | |
| Has there been a high turnover in management/ teaching staff? | | | | |
| Are faculty performance reports prepared by director for board review on an annual basis? (#24) | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |

| <p style="text-align: center;">GOVERNANCE (Program Manager and Attorney)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Not in place at this time</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Under Development</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Already in Practice</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p> |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Has there been a high turnover of trustees? | | | | |
| Are all new board members appointed in accordance with the charter provisions and bylaws? | | | | |
| Are there a parent and teacher representative and the chairperson of the Local Board of Education or the designee of such chairperson serving on the Board? | | | | |
| Are board agendas prepared and maintained? (#10) | | | | |
| Are board meetings held regularly and documented by written minutes? (#10) | | | | |
| Are board agendas and written minutes posted publically on the internet? | | | | |
| Do minutes reflect board approvals of management hires? | | | | |
| Do minutes reflect board approvals of major expenditures? | | | | |
| Does the Board regularly receive and review financial information? | | | | |
| Are board members paid employees, vendors or contractors of the school? | | | | |
| Does the Board evaluate the performance of the director/ principal on an annual basis? (#24) | | | | |
| <p>Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)</p> | | | | |

| <p style="text-align: center;">TEACHING STAFF (Assessment Consultant and Certification Consultant)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Not in place at this time</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Under Development</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Already in Practice</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p> |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Are staff certified in the subject areas they are assigned and are records of durational shortage area permits or long term permits for faculty not fully certified on file? (#11)</p> | | | | |
| <p>Is there is a professional development plan for faculty including documentation of programs offered and their evaluation? (#12)</p> | | | | |
| <p>Does the school have a list of induction/mentoring activities undertaken to support newer teachers? (#13)</p> | | | | |

Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)

SPECIAL EDUCATION
(Special Education Consultant)

| SPECIAL EDUCATION (Special Education Consultant) | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Is there a method of identifying students requiring special education services from student records? | | | | |
| How is it ensured that students requiring services receiving them? (#20) | | | | |
| Is there a process for referring students for consideration for special education? | | | | |
| Have all student records been received for all students attending the school? | | | | |
| Is there a process for obtaining student records from the sending district? | | | | |
| Is the number of students requiring special education enrolled at school recorded? | | | | |

Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)

| ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE (Program Manager and Attorney) | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Does the school maintain daily attendance records? (#21) | | | | |
| Are daily enrollment records maintained? (#22) | | | | |
| Is there a high turnover of students? | | | | |
| Do written attendance policies exist? (#8) | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |

| FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, BOOKS AND MATERIALS (Program Manager) | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Is there an equipment inventory listing? (#23) | | | | |
| Have major renovations been made to the school building? | | | | |
| Does the school appear to be clean and free of safety hazards? | | | | |

Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)

| <p style="text-align: center;">CURRICULUM (Curriculum and Assessment Consultant)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Not in place at this time</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Under Development</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Already in Practice</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p> |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <p>A written plan outlining content standards and student expectations for all grades is in place: (#14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arts • Career education • Consumer education • Health and safety • Language arts • Mathematics • Physical education • Science • Social studies • World language (s) – for high school only • Vocational education – for high school only | | | | |
| <p>Is written curriculum based on state standards, current research and best practices?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Do curriculum documents display a continuum of skills and concepts within each content area?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)</p> | | | | |

| | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Curriculum is evaluated and revised regularly with input from professional staff. (#16) | | | | |
| Is a written plan in place for on-going revision of curriculum? (#15) | | | | |
| Is curriculum revision based on a longitudinal analysis of student achievement data, the school's strategic goals and current state standards? | | | | |
| Are student data from formative and summative assessments used to inform curriculum revision? | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |
| | | | | |

| | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Curriculum is aligned vertically and horizontally. | | | | |
| Is there evidence of on-going meetings among key school staff to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum? | | | | |
| Are teachers trained to use/implement the curriculum materials? (#12) | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |

| <p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCTION (Curriculum and Assessment Consultant)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Not in place at this time</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Under Development</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Already in Practice</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p> |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Instruction is aligned with state standards. (#17 and #18)</p> | | | | |
| <p>Are classrooms adequately and equitably stocked with instructional materials, supplies and resources?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Are lessons aligned with state standards and the school's curriculum?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Is student work evident and reflect lesson objectives and curriculum goals?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Do teachers receive on-going professional development in standards-based instruction including content and research-based strategies? (#12)</p> | | | | |
| <p>Do observations of instructional time document efficient use of time?</p> | | | | |
| <p>Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s)</p> | | | | |

| | Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Offer a sufficient range of instructional techniques to meet individual strengths and needs of students. (Curriculum and Assessment Consultant) | | | | |
| Does classroom instruction include a range of instructional techniques to meet individual strengths and needs of students? | | | | |
| Do teachers/staff deliver instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences? | | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | | |

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

(Curriculum and Assessment Consultant)

| Not in place at this time | Under Development | Already in Practice | Comments |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Multiple assessments are administered and utilized to set priorities, inform instruction and revise curriculum. (#19) | | | |
| Are data from student assessments used to measure student progress over time? | | | |
| Is a system in place to use results from CMT and /or CAPT and additional standardized tests to identify strengths and areas of need? | | | |
| Are formative and summative assessments aligned with curriculum and state standards? | | | |
| Do teachers assess learning through the use of a variety of tools and strategies? | | | |
| Is professional development made available as needed? | | | |
| Is there a method in place for teachers to use results from ongoing formative and summative assessments to inform instruction and provide feedback to students (data teams, grade level teams, departmental or school-wide data teams)? | | | |
| Recommendation(s)/ Commendation(s) | | | |

List of Documents

1. General ledger
2. Accounting manual
3. Chart of accounts
4. Most recent audit
5. Written procedures about handling and depositing daily cash receipts
6. Organization chart
7. Job descriptions for teachers and administrators
8. Handbook of school policies and procedures
9. Teacher contract
10. Agenda and minutes from the 2009-2010 school year board meetings
11. Documentation of staff certification including durational shortage area permits or long term substitute permits for faculty not fully certified
12. Faculty professional development plans for the year and programs offered
13. List of induction/ mentoring activities to support newer teachers
14. Written curriculum in all subject areas pursuant to Section 10-16b of the Connecticut General Statutes
15. Curriculum revision plan
16. Evidence of staff collaboration regarding curriculum review, analysis of student achievement and professional development needs
17. Recent lesson plans, related student work and related assessments (sampling from all content areas from a variety of grade levels)
18. Classroom observations may take place between 10:00 am and Noon. Please ensure that all teachers have lesson plans available for review team.
19. Student Assessment Plan, including evidence of how formative and summative assessment results are used to inform instruction
20. Special education student file
21. Daily attendance records
22. Daily enrollment records
23. Equipment inventory listing
24. Faculty and administrator evaluation documents



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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Ms. Lizanne Cox, Director
Common Ground High School

FROM: Robert Kelly, Program Manager
Charter School Program

DATE: October 27, 2009

SUBJECT: Implementation of the Charter School Renewal Process

The Charter School Office has arranged site renewal visits for each charter school whose charter is up for renewal and will arrange and notify you of the public hearing to take place later in the 2009-10 school year.

Compliance with the Law

As we approach site renewal visits, it is important that charter schools ensure they are in compliance with the law. For example:

- Do you have certified teachers?
- Do you have clearly defined financial records?
- Do you have a curriculum that is planned, ongoing, and systematic?
Please review Section 10-16b of the Connecticut General Statutes which describes prescribed course of study to ensure you are in compliance with state law.
- Do you provide special education services to children requiring such services?
- Are your books and educational materials sufficient for the program, curriculum, and student enrollment?
- Do you have proper documentation to support waivers the charter school requested from the State Department of Education and received as a result of such request? (e.g.: physical education, art) If you are missing such documentation or are unsure about the status of the requested waiver, contact the Charter School Office as soon as possible.
- The "Management Responsibilities Checklist" is provided on page six of the renewal application as a reference as you seek to ensure the charter school has complied with state and federal educational requirements.
- Do you have written professional development and teacher evaluations plans?

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Important Indicators Regarding Renewal

As indicated in the renewal application, important indicators as the charter school reflects on renewal include:

1. Faithfulness to mission and goals.
2. Demonstrating academic progress using internal and external assessments.
3. Showing evidence of continuous improvement and a plan for the charter school over the next five years.
4. Satisfaction of parents and students affiliated with the charter school.
5. Strong and consistent management and governance; charter school on solid financial ground.
6. Compliance with state and federal laws and State Department of Education administrative requirements.

Annual Report v. Renewal Application

Many representatives from charter schools have asked the Charter School Office to describe the difference between the renewal application and the annual report. The distinction is as follows:

Annual Report

A snapshot in time of the charter school over the most recent year.

Renewal Application

A demonstration of the longitudinal progress of students from their point of enrollment up until the time of renewal and progress of the school over that time. (Please refer to item IV "Expectations for a Successful Application" and item VI (A) (3), and "Content: The Charter School Academic Program" contained in the renewal application for further guidance.)

Questions

Please call Robert Kelly, Charter School Program Manager at (860) 713-6574 if you have any questions regarding the renewal application.

RK:fc

xc: Mark Linabury, Bureau Chief