



New York State Board of Regents
State Education Department
Charter School Office
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

May 8, 2024

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

On April 5, 2024, our school submitted a list of factual corrections and identified inaccuracies in the draft Renewal Site Visit Report to the NYSED CSO. We are now in receipt of the finalized report which essentially rejects the majority of the factual corrections noted, and in some instances provides responses that either further the factual incorrectness of the statements made in the initial draft report, or do not address them at all. No comment was made as to the significant concerns we raised regarding the proposed report, which has now been finalized without addressing those concerns.

To repeat the issues brought to the attention of the CSO upon receipt of the draft report, and in accordance with our right to provide evaluative comments on the final report, we reiterate that we do not accept that the final renewal site visit report properly reflects the growth and progress of our students and our institution over our first charter term. Neither does it address or consider our Renewal Application or reflect the feedback and ratings that we received from the CSO over the course of our first term. As we shared in our response to the initial draft report, as noted above, we are not advocating for laxity in accountability. However, the failure to identify a comparative school, which is a fundamental component in the framework upon which schools are rated, as well as the lack of an evidentiary basis for the diminishment from “Meets” to “Approaching” in Benchmarks 2 and 7, does not support the final assessment and cannot be overlooked. The continued misalignment between Benchmark ratings, continued factual inaccuracies contained in the report and commentary provided by the CSO in the report, furthers this conviction.

As we previously advised the CSO, we have serious concerns with the clear misstatement in the Renewal Site Visit Report that the “CSO team was unable to see the accommodations recommended in the IEP’s in any of the classes.” The statement is directly contradicted by data cited in the report as accommodations and differentiation were present in every classroom visited by the CSO. Moreover, the site visit report itself states “[a]ll observed classrooms had a minimum of two teachers, and most had multiple paraprofessionals and service providers present in the classroom at the time of the observation.” Given the focus of our school and the target population that we serve, (where 67% of our students are SWDs), and with classrooms staffed fully to meet the needs of these students as noted in the report, it is erroneous to state there was no evidence of IEP implementation observed in the classrooms.

Further, we also cited concerns with statements made by the CSO in discussing Benchmark 2, wherein the report claims “[o]ver this charter term, the trajectory for this benchmark has declined from Meets to Approaches due to a weakening support of diverse learners that includes a lack of differentiation for ELL students; CSE concerns about the school’s use of grade retention and monitoring of students with extended absences from school; and the use of exit tickets and individualized goals not observed in classrooms.” Those claims remain unsupported.

As advised, we have a demonstrated effective working relationship with our local CSE and while we were never informed that consultation with the local CSE was part of the renewal process and overall monitoring plan, we also never received feedback from our CSE partners on any of the concerns which are first asserted in the report. The report indicates that the CSE noted that “Bridge Prep communicates often with families” while also saying that “the CSE has received concerns from parents that the school is



unresponsive to their requests” which is contradictory language. So too, it is consistent with the standard operating procedures used by the school and the CSE as they relate requests made to the school for varying levels of support and compliance related items for SWDs. If the school receives such a request that is the responsibility of the CSE to address, the school forwards those communications and requests to the CSE to follow up with the family. Upon receipt of the draft report, we requested, but did not receive, more specific information regarding the feedback from the CSE included in the report.

In response to the initial draft report, we sought clarity on the criteria for the school’s rating in Benchmark 10, as the bullet points cited in this section of the report provide little evidence to explain why this section is rated “Approaches” rather than “Meets.” In our initial letter responding to the draft report, we provided an overview of NYSED CSO site visit reports from the 2022-23 school year showing inconsistencies in the rating of Benchmark 10 with the rating received by Bridge Prep. Said inconsistencies, which specifically referenced four different schools, made it unclear why Bridge Prep received a rating of “Approaches” while the four schools cited all noted improvement thereby receiving a ranking of “Meets”, despite “serious safety violations” and failures of compliance with the Education Law. These concerns were not responded to by our CSO liaison to date.

Throughout our first charter term, Bridge Prep has worked in partnership with NYSED wherever possible. While our Board of Trustees and School leadership have been eager to collaborate, we have been met with little communication or clarity from the CSO. For example, for a full year (from August 2022 to August 2023), we were not assigned a liaison to support our school. After multiple requests about our lack of liaison, we were finally assigned a new liaison in August 2023, which left very little time for the new liaison to meet our team, visit our school community or understand our model. The first time a CSO team member visited our school was during the Renewal Site Visit.

The NYSED CSO advised Bridge Prep the day before the scheduled visit- that representatives from the Special Education Quality Assurance office would be joining the visit to provide input. Bridge Prep welcomed our local Regent, the NYS Education Commissioner, many elected officials, and many other education officials from across the State, multiple times during our initial charter term. While we welcome members of the Special Education Quality Assurance Office to visit and provide their helpful feedback, the last minute inclusion of these team members to the Renewal Visit represented a deviation from the pre-established agenda and Site Visit Protocols shared with Bridge Prep by the CSO, and it appears that their initial input was considered disproportionately to the broader NYSED Renewal Process.

While we asked for our concerns to be addressed prior to issuance of the final report, no response was received. We believe it is our responsibility to Bridge Prep’s children and our school community to assure that the final report presents an accurate record. As asserted in our initial letter, and repeated herein, we do not agree that the final report is factually accurate nor does it properly reflect our institution, the demonstrated growth and progress of our students, or the feedback and ratings that we received from the CSO during the course of our first charter term.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing to partner together.

Laurel Wedinger-Gyimesi

Laurel Wedinger-Gyimesi, Board of Trustees Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Castanza", written in a cursive style.

Timothy Castanza, Executive Director