



**New Jersey Department of Education,  
Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools**

**Charter School Renewal Site Visit Protocol  
2022-2023**

## Overview

The renewal of a charter school was established in the Charter School Program Act of 1995 as a way to facilitate the comprehensive review of a charter. The comprehensive review is aligned to the Performance Framework developed by the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools, New Jersey Department of Education (Department), and meant to capture information that allows the Department to evaluate a charter school's performance based on the criteria set forth in the Performance Framework and N.J.A.C. 6A:11-2.3. Members of the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools (OCRS) review the evidence collected to gauge, for each charter school up for renewal, the charter school's track record of academic performance, fiscal viability and organizational soundness over the course of the last charter term.

One component of the renewal process and comprehensive review is the Renewal Site Visit (site visit). The site visit is also aligned to the standards set forth in the Performance Framework and is designed to objectively evaluate the success of a charter school in meeting its mission and providing a high-quality public education to its students. The site visit is conducted to ensure a thorough review of a charter school and to provide an opportunity for reviewers to see a charter school in action. Site visits may differ in terms of length and breadth based on the charter school's academic performance on state assessments, graduation rate (if applicable), performance against the standards set forth in the Performance Framework, and probationary status with the Department.

This Protocol is designed to provide practical information about the site visit so that stakeholders know what to expect and how to prepare. Familiarity with the procedures, protocols and responsibilities will help to ensure that each site visit runs smoothly and ultimately generates an evaluation that provides charter schools with useful feedback.

## Differentiated Site Visits

Central to the charter school concept is the trade-off between autonomy and accountability: charter schools in New Jersey receive greater autonomy in exchange for greater accountability. If a charter school is not producing marked results, it runs the risk of its charter being non-renewed or revoked. The Department conducts a site visit of each charter school eligible for renewal. However, site visits are differentiated based on a charter school's academic performance on state assessments, graduation rate (if applicable), performance against the standards set forth in the Performance Framework, and probationary status with the Department. For example, the Department may conduct abbreviated site visits of charter schools that have a track record of success on state assessments, have presented audit reports with unqualified opinions in each year of the last charter term, and have demonstrated sound organizational practices based on the standards set forth in the Organizational Performance Framework. Charter schools that do not meet those criteria, or are not complying with all areas of the Performance Framework, are subject to greater oversight. Table 1 below provides general guidelines for the different types of site visits that the Department conducts.

**Table 1: Site Visits**

Site Visit Type	Approximate Length	Site Visit Components
Abbreviated	3–4 Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with board president, school leader, special education staff, ESL/bilingual staff, students, parents and guardians and School Business Administrator (SBA)</li> <li>• Classroom walk-throughs</li> <li>• Document Review</li> <li>• End of Day Debrief</li> </ul>
Typical	Full Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with board of trustees, school leader, teachers, data administrator, special education staff, ESL/bilingual staff, SBA, parents and students</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Document Review</li> <li>• End of Day Debrief</li> </ul>
In-Depth	2 Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with board of trustees, school leader, teachers, data administrator, special education staff, ESL/bilingual staff, SBA, parents and students</li> <li>• Classroom Observations</li> <li>• Document Review</li> <li>• End of Day Debrief</li> </ul>

Please note that critical findings from a site visit may lead to additional oversight by the Department and/or a warning letter or probationary status. Charter schools eligible for renewal that are already on probation are subject to additional oversight through the renewal process. Lastly, charter schools that do not meet any of the standards set forth in the Fiscal Performance Framework are subject to an on-site financial review as part of the site visit. **Note:** The length and type of site visit and required elements will be determined by the Department and communicated to schools directly.

## Renewal Site Visit Components

### Scheduling Visit Dates

The Department typically conducts site visits between October and December and proposes one date for the site visit. If the Department’s proposed date creates a serious conflict for a charter school, then the Department and charter school will work together to find a mutually agreeable alternate date. However, site visit dates are generally not changed unless a serious conflict exists. Once the school

leader knows the date of the site visit, the school leader should relay that information to all relevant stakeholders and ensure that regular programming will be occurring at the charter school on that date.

## **Pre-visit Planning and Preparation**

The Department assumes that the school leader will act as the coordinator and liaison for the site visit, although the charter school may designate another person to assume this role. The site visit coordinator should be knowledgeable about the charter school's schedule, be able to communicate quickly with various stakeholders, and be able to work with colleagues to resolve any scheduling issues. A representative from the Department will work with the site visit coordinator to ensure that all required documents are submitted to the Department for review in the appropriate manner and by the prescribed deadline. A list of all required documents is found in the Checklist for School Leaders/Site Visit Coordinators ([Appendix A](#)).

## **Site visit Team Members**

All site visit teams are led by a Department staff member or designee. The site visit team leader facilitates the day and coordinates the efforts of the team members, who bring expertise in various areas, such as fiscal management, curriculum and instruction. A site visit team may consist of two to eight members depending on, among other factors, the size of the charter school.

## **On-site Visit**

The site visit team will conduct interviews, observe classrooms, and review documents during the site visit. The school is asked to make several documents available for review. As many of these documents are housed on digital platforms, the school is encouraged to provide the Department with electronic access to these items prior to the day of the site visit. For details regarding required documentation, see [Appendix A](#), Checklist for School Leaders/Site Visit Coordinators.

## **End of visit Debrief**

At the end of the site visit, the site visit team will share initial observations and findings with the charter school based on the day's site visit. Please note that these initial observations and findings are preliminary; a summary of the Department's comprehensive review of the charter school, of which the site visit is one component, will be made available to each charter school through a Renewal Summary Report.

# Renewal Site Visit Structure

The following (A–G) provides a general overview of the structure of the site visit:

## A. Pre-Visit

- Schedule and protocol are sent to each charter school eligible for renewal.
- The Department and charter school agree upon date(s) for the site visit.
- The schedule for the site visit is reviewed and group interview times are established between the site visit coordinator and the Department representative.
- Site visit coordinators procure all required documentation listed in Appendix A and submit all pre-visit documents to the Department representative by the prescribed deadlines.

## B. Meet and Greet

- Board members and school leadership team greet site visit team members.
- Site visit team conducts introductions and establishes goals, purpose and norms for the visit.
- School leadership orients the site visit team to the school and building.
- Schedule and group interview times and locations are confirmed.

## C. Site visit team conducts group interviews, classroom visits, document review, and additional information gathering

- Site visit team members may participate in a combination of group interviews, classroom visits, document review, and additional information gathering.
- Conversations with groups will be informed by the site visit Protocol and Performance Framework.
- Classroom observations will be guided by each charter school's mission, key design elements, and instructional practices as described in each charter school's Renewal Application.

## D. Group Interviews

- Information regarding the opportunity to participate in the site visit should be made public. Please do not hand-select interview participants.
- Department staff or designees will conduct the interviews.
- Respondents will be asked to respond to interview questions openly and honestly. The site visit team will not refer to participants by name during the end of visit debrief nor on the Renewal Summary Report.

- Use facts and data to respond to questions whenever possible.
- Site visit team members will take notes during the visit as needed. Follow-up questions may be asked after the site visit.
- Board member interviews will be conducted at a time that allows for as many board members as possible to attend while being mindful of a quorum. Only voting board members are invited to this interview. The school leader or SBA is not invited to attend the board member interview.
- While the site visit team will call on school administrators throughout the site visit, the Department has set aside approximately one hour to interview the school administrators directly responsible for academics and operations.
- Department staff will meet with the Special Education and English as a Second Language program coordinators, or staff responsible, to address the academic program focusing on these special populations.
- Department staff will meet with the Data Administrator(s), or staff responsible, to address the academic program focusing on the use of data as a driving force in instruction and school decisions.
- Department staff will meet with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 10 parents or guardians who represent a broad range of grades, years spent at the school, and academic performance levels. The group should be prepared to tell Department staff how they were recruited for this meeting, how they found out about the site visit and how they were prepared for the interview.
- All teachers should be offered the opportunity to participate in the site visit. The Department requires a minimum of 4 teachers to participate in the teacher interviews and would appreciate speaking to teachers with a broad range of experience, time employed by the charter school, from different subjects and/or grade levels. Please make an effort to schedule those teachers who play a significant role in developing and implementing the school's educational program.
- Student interviews will be conducted for students in Grade 3 and above. Student participants should represent a variety of ages, grade levels, and time spent at the school.
- If members of the finance team attend the site visit, the SBA should make him/herself available throughout the day.

## **E. Classroom Observations**

- School staff is informed of site visit before the day begins. The site visit team will observe classrooms at multiple grade levels and subjects during a full day site visit.
- Classroom visits are scheduled throughout the day in hopes of seeing lessons at various stages.
- Classroom visits should not disrupt the classroom or the lesson.
- Teacher lesson plans should be available for all classrooms directly outside the classroom door or submitted in advance via Homeroom.
- The purpose of classroom visits is to collect evidence and capture schoolwide trends. They are not intended to evaluate individual teaching and/or teachers.

- Site visit team members will be taking notes during classroom observations.

## **F. Document Review**

- Site visit team members will review electronic documents prior to the visit.
- Site visit team members will review documents on-site such as curriculum documents, student files, personnel files and special education files, as requested.
- Additional documents may be requested.

## **G. Team Debrief**

- Site visit team members will share preliminary findings from the site visit with school administrators, board members and other members of the school community as invited by the school.
- Site visit team members describe next steps in the renewal process. Final decisions regarding renewal will not be available at this time

## Site Visit Schedule

The site visit schedule depends on the site visit type: Abbreviated, Typical or In-Depth. Below you will find sample schedules for each site visit type. The sample schedule may be revised if necessary to accommodate unique conflicts or school schedules. The site visit coordinator should work with the Department designee to create a workable schedule for the charter school. The finalized schedule must include locations or platforms for each group interview and an assigned private location where the site visit team may be stationed throughout the entirety of the site visit to review documents and debrief in private for in-person visits. While on site, site visit team members may schedule additional meetings if necessary. The Department designee will remain in contact with site visit coordinator throughout the day to ensure for a productive and efficient site visit.

### Abbreviated Sample Schedule

Time	Activity
9:00 a.m.–9:15 a.m.	Meet and Greet with Administration
9:15 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Classroom Observations
10:00 a.m.– 11:00 a.m.	Board of Trustees/Administration Interview
11:00 a.m.–11:45 p.m.	Spec. Ed/ESL Coordinator Interview
11:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Debrief



## Typical Sample Schedule

Time	Program Team	Program Team	Program Team	Fiscal Team
8:30 a.m. –9:30 a.m.	Class Visits	Class Visits	Class Visits	Class Visits
9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Meet and Greet with Board and Administration	Meet and Greet with Board and Administration	Meet and Greet with Board and Administration	Meet and Greet with Board and Administration
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.	Board of Trustees Interview	Board of Trustees Interview	Classroom Observations	Board of Trustees Interview
11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Administration Interview	Administration Interview	Classroom Observations	Meet with SBA
12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.	Lunch/ Team Prep	Lunch/ Team Prep	Lunch/ Team Prep	Lunch/ Team Prep
1:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m.	Teacher Interview	Classroom Observations	Teacher Interview	Document Review
2:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.	Student Interview	Student Interview	Parent Interview	Document Review
2:30 p.m.–3:15 p.m.	Data Administrator Interview	Spec. Ed/ESL Coordinator Interview	Document Review	Document Review
3:15 p.m. –3:45 p.m.	Team Preparation (extra doc review if needed)	Team Preparation (extra doc review if needed)	Team Preparation (extra doc review if needed)	Team Preparation (extra doc review if needed)
3:45 p.m.–4:00 p.m.	Debrief	Debrief	Debrief	Debrief

## In-Depth Sample Schedule

### Day One

Time	Team Members	Team Members	Team Members	Fiscal Team
10:00 a.m.–10:30 a.m.	Team Arrives and Orients to School	Team Arrives and Orients to School	Team Arrives and Orients to School	Team Arrives and Orients to School
10:30 a.m.– 11:30 a.m.	Interview School Leader	Interview School Leader	Classroom Observations	Interview School Leader
11:30 a.m.–12:15 p.m.	Teacher Interview	Parent Interview	Parent Interview	Interview School Leader
12:15 p.m.–1:15 p.m.	Working Lunch and Team Meeting	Working Lunch and Team Meeting	Working Lunch and Team Meeting	Working Lunch and Team Meeting
1:15 p.m. –2:00 p.m.	Student Interviews	Teacher Interviews	Teacher Interviews	Interview SBA
2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.	Classroom Observations	Interview Assessment Coordinator	Document Review	Interview SBA
3:00 p.m. –3:45 p.m.	Document Review	Interview HIB Coordinator	Interview Special Education Coordinator	Document Review
3:45 p.m.–4:30 p.m.	Document Review	Interview Counselor/Social Worker	Document Review	Document Review
4:30 p.m.–5:00 p.m.	Monitoring Team Preparation	Monitoring Team Preparation	Monitoring Team Preparation	Monitoring Team Preparation

## Day Two

Time	Team Members	Team Members	Team Members	Fiscal Team
8:00 a.m.–8:15 a.m.	Team Arrival	Team Arrival	Team Arrival	Team Arrival
8:15 a.m.– 9:45 a.m.	Interview Board of Trustees	Interview Board of Trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview ELL Coordinator</li> <li>Teacher Interview</li> </ul>	Interview Board of Trustees
10:00 a.m.–10:45 a.m.	Classroom Observations	Classroom Observations	Interview ELA and Math Coaches (if applicable)	Interview SBA
10:45 a.m.–11:30 a.m.	Sit-in on Team Meeting	Classroom Observations	Teacher Interview	Interview SBA
11:30 a.m. –12:00 p.m.	Teacher Interview	Student Interviews	Classroom Observations	Interview SBA
12:00 p.m. –1:00 p.m.	<b>Working Lunch and Team Meeting</b>	<b>12:00 p.m. –1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Working Lunch and Team Meeting</b>	<b>12:00 p.m. –1:00 p.m.</b>
1:00 p.m. –2:00 p.m.	Follow-up with School Leader	Teacher Interviews	Final Document Reviews	Document Review
2:00 p.m. –4:00 p.m.	Team Discussion and Drafting	Team Discussion and Drafting	Team Discussion and Drafting	Team Discussion and Drafting
4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.	Debrief with School Leadership Team	Debrief with School Leadership Team	Debrief with School Leadership Team	Debrief with School Leadership Team

## Appendix A: Site Visit Checklist for School Leaders/Site Visit Coordinators

The Department has created the following checklist to help schools prepare for the Renewal Site Visit.

### Approximately Six to Eight Weeks Prior to the Site Visit

Checklist Item	Check (✓)
1. Review the Site Visit Protocol	
2. Speak with the school's board members, staff, families, students and community to orient them to the purpose of the site visit, what their respective roles will be during the visit, and what to expect during the site visit. Inform teachers that classroom observations will be part of the site visit; however, assure teachers that the purpose of classroom visits is to collect evidence and capture schoolwide trends--not to evaluate individual teaching and/or teachers.	
3. Begin to gather the required pre-visit documents (listed below).	
4. Submit PPE requirements and safety protocol measures for visitors via email and Homeroom	

### Three Weeks Prior to the Site Visit

Send all the following documents in electronic format to the Department designee via Homeroom, as indicated below.

Document	Check (✓)
1. Parking instructions for visitors.	
2. <b>Master Class Schedule:</b> A master class schedule for the day of the visit that clearly indicates the teacher, subject, time, and location (room assignments) for all classes. Please identify on the schedule which classes are special education inclusion, pullout, or substantially separate placements.	
3. <b>Staff Roster:</b> A staff roster that includes administrator and teacher names, number of years of teaching and/or administrative experience, number of years at the school, and subject and/or grade taught or administrative role. Please identify any staff that has ESL or special education licensure. Please use the template provided in <a href="#">Appendix B</a> .	
4. <b>Response to Intervention Plan:</b> A copy of your school's response to intervention plan. This plan is developed by the school to ensure that the needs of diverse learners in the	

Document	Check (✓)
general education program are met.	
5. <b>Finance and Compliance Documentation:</b> documentation that are needed will be specified separately by a finance member of the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools.	
6. <b>Additional Documentation:</b> Additional documentation may be requested. You will be notified by a Department representative on a case by case basis.	

### Approximately Two Weeks Prior to the Site Visit

Checklist Item	Check (✓)
1. Identify a secure and private place that can serve as a meeting room for the site visit team throughout the day. Please ensure that this room allows for proper social distancing.	
2. Finalize the site visit schedule with the Department designee, including rooms that will be used for the interviews/document review. Please ensure that the rooms selected allow for proper social distancing.	
3. Speak with the Department designee to review and finalize the site visit schedule, as well as discuss logistics and materials. Please ask questions about the site visit and protocol at this time.	

### Approximately One Week Prior to the Site Visit

Checklist Item	Check (✓)
1. Confirm interview participation from board members, teachers, students, families, and staff.	
2. If conducting interviews virtually, confirm the platform and accessibility for participants and Department members.	
3. Begin to assemble the on-site documentation (listed below).	

## Day Before the Site Visit

Checklist Item	Check (✓)
1. Distribute the site visit schedule to the school community.	
2. Remind teachers to make extra copies of any lesson materials so they are available to site visit team members (though teachers should not create any materials solely for this purpose).	
3. Ensure that teacher lesson plans for the day of the site visit are available.	

Ensure that the following materials are available, organized, and clearly labeled in the site visit team's private meeting space:

Item	Check (✓)
4. <b>School Map:</b> A school map, with corresponding teacher room assignments or marked with teacher names and showing the location of special education and ELL instructional spaces (provide one copy for each team member).	
5. <b>Survey Information:</b> Aggregated family, teacher, and student survey information, if available.	
6. <b>Evaluation Tools:</b> Samples of educator and administrator evaluation tools;	
7. <b>Agendas:</b> Professional development calendar/agendas	
8. <b>Curricular documents:</b> Curricular documents, which may include scopes and sequences, unit plans, and any relevant testing data not already provided to the team. Please have someone available who can guide a site visit team member through these materials. If curriculum is stored electronically (for example, a shared drive or folder), provide written directions for how to access these materials, as well as staff to guide a site visit team member through the files;	
9. A copy of the special education and ELL policies and procedures manuals.	
10. <b>Other materials:</b> Any other materials that the school leadership believes will assist the site visit team in efficiently reviewing the school's performance under its charter contract; and	
11. <b>Schedule of Classes and Supports:</b> A schedule of classes and supports happening on the day of the site visit outside each classroom (optional, but preferred).	

## During the Visit

Checklist Item	Check (✓)
1. Ensure that the site visit team’s meeting room remains private and all requested documents are provided and clearly labeled. Please also ensure that adequate power outlets are available for laptop usage, which may require providing a power strip and/or extension cords.	
2. Bring concerns and questions to the attention of the Department designee as they arise.	
3. Attend the debrief meeting to discuss the site visit team’s preliminary findings. Invite additional staff or board members to attend the meeting as needed.	

## Appendix B: Template for Staff Roster

Please use the following template to create a staff roster. Please include all teachers and administrators. Add rows as needed.

### Instructions

- **Column 1, Name of Staff Member:** List all staff members alphabetically by last name
- **Column 3, Position, Title or Teaching Assignment and Grade Level:** Include all staff, administrators, teachers, secretaries, cafeteria, etc.
- **Column 4, Certificates:** Include specific certificate title such as Principal, Science K–12, Elementary K–5, etc.
- **Column 5, Certificate Type:** Indicate if CE, Provisional, Charter, Charter Cert., etc.
- **Column 6, Criminal History Approval:** Date and agency of approval

Name of Staff Member	Date of Hire	Position, Title, or Teaching Assignment and Grade Level	Certificate(s)	Certificate Type	Criminal History Approval