



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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*Governor*

TAHESHA L. WAY  
*Lt. Governor*

ANGELICA ALLEN-McMILLAN, Ed.D.  
*Acting Commissioner*

January 31, 2024

Joshua Bishop-Mbachu, President  
Board of Trustees  
Academy for Urban Leadership Charter School  
612 Amboy Avenue  
Perth Amboy, New Jersey 08861

Dear Mr. Bishop-Mbachu:

Academy for Urban Leadership Charter School (AULCS) opened in 2010 and is currently in its fourteenth year of operation. AULCS submitted its renewal application on October 12, 2023 and has been evaluated by the New Jersey Department of Education (Department) on its academic performance, fiscal viability and operational stability. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-17 and N.J.A.C. 6A:11-2.3(b), the Department has completed a comprehensive review of AULCS including, but not limited to, the renewal application, annual reports, student performance on statewide assessments, a structured interview with school officials, public comments, student composition of AULCS and the fiscal impact on the sending district in order to render a renewal decision. Based on this review, I am pleased to inform you that I am renewing AULCS for a period of five years through June 30, 2029; however, effective immediately, I am placing AULCS on probation. A Renewal Summary Report, which contains the findings gathered from the comprehensive review, is forthcoming.

The Department utilizes the Academic section of the Performance Framework, which consists of three academic performance frameworks, to evaluate the relative success of the elementary, middle and high school programs offered by charter schools. Academic performance is assessed by tested grade span, with Grades 3-5 representing the elementary program, Grades 6-8 the middle school program and Grades 9-12 the high school program. Each academic performance framework consists of four categories of metrics: Student Growth (or Graduation Rate for high school programs), Achievement, Leading Indicators and Closing Gaps. Each metric is worth a number of points, and the percent of total points earned determines the Tier Rank for each program. Tier Rank 1 programs are considered high performing, Tier Rank 2 middle performing and Tier Rank 3 low performing. The Department did not establish a Tier Rank for school years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 due to an absence of statewide assessment data in school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Academic Tier Rankings for all charter schools in the state of New Jersey are anticipated for release in the 2023-2024 school year.

AULCS' academic performance on statewide assessments throughout the charter term strongly suggests that it is not providing students with a high-quality education that merges the highest standards of academic excellence as described in the school's approved mission and key design elements. AULCS achieved an academic Tier Rank 2 in 2019 based on 2018-2019 New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) results, attaining 33%

proficiency in English language arts (ELA) compared to the statewide proficiency rate in ELA of 57.9% in that same year. Based on 2018-2019 NJSLA results, AULCS' district of residence, the Perth Amboy Public School District, attained 41.8% proficiency in ELA. In 2023, AULCS' ELA proficiency was 16.3% compared to the statewide proficiency rate in ELA of 51.3%, while the Perth Amboy Public School District attained 32.2% proficiency in ELA. In 2019, AULCS' mathematics proficiency was not reported as the tested student group was below the suppression size. In accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) guidelines, data are suppressed where the student population size is fewer than 20. In 2023, AULCS' mathematics proficiency was 2.7% compared to the statewide mathematics proficiency of 38.2%, while the Perth Amboy Public School District attained 14.1% in mathematics in that same year. Throughout the current charter term, AULCS has been outperformed by its district of residence and the state of New Jersey on statewide assessments in ELA and mathematics.

AULCS' 2019 ELA median student growth percentile (mSGP) of 40 met ESSA accountability standards, while the Perth Amboy Public School District also met ESSA accountability standards with an ELA mSGP of 44 in that same year. In 2023, AULCS' ELA mSGP of 28.5 did not meet ESSA accountability standards compared to Perth Amboy Public School District's mSGP of 46 which met ESSA accountability standards. AULCS' 2019 mathematics mSGP of 30 did not meet ESSA accountability standards, while Perth Amboy Public School District met ESSA accountability standards with a mathematics mSGP of 43 in that same year. In 2023, AULCS' mathematics mSGP of 22.5 did not meet ESSA accountability standards compared to Perth Amboy Public School District's mSGP of 39 which also did not meet ESSA accountability standards. AULCS' mSGP throughout the charter term presents significant concern regarding AULCS' ability to provide high-quality instruction across all content areas; therefore, the Department will continue to monitor AULCS' mSGP and the percent of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on statewide assessments toward demonstrable gains through the next charter term.

Through the renewal process, it has been determined that AULCS has not implemented its mission with fidelity. AULCS' mission "to employ educational design and experience" by providing a school environment that "merges the highest standards of academic excellence while fostering convictions and commitment to social and economic justice" has not been actualized in the current charter term. As evidenced by the number of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on statewide assessments, AULCS has failed to fulfill its mission to equip students with "the academic, social, and leadership skills needed to take their place in their communities and the global economy." On November 1, 2023, Department representatives conducted a renewal visit at AULCS. Classrooms observed during the renewal visit failed to demonstrate a common understanding of high-quality instruction aligned with pedagogical practices that foster mastery of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). Many observed classrooms featured low levels of student engagement and ineffective instructional pacing and delivery, with several classrooms lacking evidence of clear objectives and adequate support for multilingual learners (ML) and students with disabilities (SWD). Despite AULCS' submitted documents describing the school's employment of "tiered instructional practices" and "student-centered learning" to achieve academic success, the instructional delivery observed by Department representatives did not demonstrate evidence of these program elements. Department representatives noted multiple classrooms where lessons featured assignments that did not appear to correspond with NJSLS for the grade level or content area being taught. It is imperative that AULCS develop a strategy to address these instructional concerns.

AULCS' four-year graduation rates fell below the state average and that of its district of residence in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, indicating the school's challenge in successfully fulfilling its mission to provide students with "a comprehensive curriculum and rigorous academics" throughout the current charter term.

AULCS' 2022 four-year-graduation cohort attained a graduation rate of 82.6% compared to the state average of 90.9% and the Perth Amboy Public School District's average of 86%. AULCS' 2023 four-year-graduation cohort attained a graduation rate of 79.8% compared to the state average of 90.1% and the Perth Amboy Public School District's average of 85%. As evidenced by the school's decline in four-year graduation rates, AULCS has not demonstrated the capacity to consistently provide an academic program that ensures its students are prepared for post-secondary education and careers.

The Department uses the Organizational section of the Performance Framework to review whether AULCS has demonstrated the organizational capacity to ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education. Based upon interviews with board of trustees' members, staff, parents and students, and document review, it does not appear that AULCS has established a stable organizational structure that leads to continuous improvement. AULCS' submitted documents confirm that AULCS has employed three chief school administrators and five school business administrators within the current charter term. Interviews with board of trustees' members and AULCS' administration confirm that the present chief school administrator will not lead the school beyond the 2023-2024 school year. Additionally, the 2023 Annual Report cites a 54.5% teacher retention rate, further confirming AULCS' challenges to retain appropriately certificated and highly effective leadership and instructional staff members. As demonstrated by the instructional quality observed on the November 1, 2023 onsite visit, as well as board of trustees' members, staff, parents and student interview responses, significant transition in AULCS' school leadership and staff turnover have adversely impacted the school's ability to ensure programmatic continuity and improve student outcomes.

Equally concerning to the school's organizational stability is AULCS' suspension and expulsion policies which do not appear to align with state law and regulation. As evidenced by the school's 2022 Annual Report, the out-of-school suspension rate was 11.5% in the 2021-2022 school year with 48 of the school's 415 students assigned an out-of-school suspension. In the 2022-2023 school year, the average out-of-school suspension rate increased to 23%, with 86 of the school's 370 students assigned an out-of-school suspension. While interviewed administrators and board of trustees' members described the school's discipline protocol, these individuals did not identify AULCS' out-of-school suspension rate as an area of strategic focus for improvement.

The Department's expectations regarding charter school boards of trustees' governance practices and compliance with the School Ethics Act are also specified in the Organizational Performance Framework. Upon review, AULCS' board of trustees has demonstrated some challenges in its adherence to these expectations. The 2023 Annual Report indicates that one of AULCS' board members has failed to complete the requisite criminal background check in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:11-3.1 *et. seq.*

The Department relies on the financial section of the Performance Framework to assess financial viability based on measures of near-term financial health, longer term financial sustainability and fiscal-related compliance. The Department also considers the fiscal impact on sending districts. Review of the fiscal standing of AULCS indicates that the school met standard on some rated measures in the Fiscal Performance Framework; however, enrollment variance fell below standard in fiscal years 2020, 2022 and 2023 and fell far below standard in 2021. I expect AULCS to implement improvement efforts over the next charter term, evident through renewal, that foster compliance to all measures and indicators of the Fiscal Performance Framework.

The Department received no public comment regarding AULCS' renewal application.

The following chart confirms AULCS’ approved maximum enrollment for the approved district of residence of Perth Amboy Public School District.

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>2023-2024 Current Approved Maximum</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>	<b>2026-2027</b>	<b>2027-2028</b>	<b>2028-2029</b>
<b>Pre-K</b>	Not approved to serve Pre-K					
<b>K</b>						
<b>1</b>						
<b>2</b>						
<b>3</b>						
<b>4</b>						
<b>5</b>						
<b>6</b>						
<b>7</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>8</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>9</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>10</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>11</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>12</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>

As a condition of probation, AULCS must submit a remedial plan to the Department within 15 days of receipt of this notice of probation in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:11-24. The remedial plan must outline the steps AULCS will take to remedy the deficiencies outlined above; set measurable targets and goals for interim progress and describe how AULCS will measure the impact of its initiatives. Within 30 days of the receipt of the remedial plan, the Department will contact AULCS representatives for discussion.

Additionally, at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the board, this letter must be provided to all members of the board and those in attendance for the board meeting. Board minutes demonstrating compliance with this directive must be submitted through Homeroom. It is imperative that the board conduct this meeting in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act pursuant to *P.L. 1975, c.231* (C:10:4-5 et. Seq.) AULCS must inform parents and teachers of the school’s probationary status and provide the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools a narrative description of the procedures used, and copies of related correspondence sent to inform teachers and parents of the school’s status.

Furthermore, AULCS is directed to limit the expenditure of funds to only those expenditures that are reasonable and necessary for the ongoing day-to-day operation of the charter school. These expenditures are limited to salaries, benefits, utilities, rent insurance and existing accounts payable. The expenditures must already be authorized in the board-approved budget. Any expenditures in excess of those already set forth in the budget, including any necessary expenditures to implement the remedial action plan and the plan must be submitted to and approved by the Office of Charter and Renaissance School.

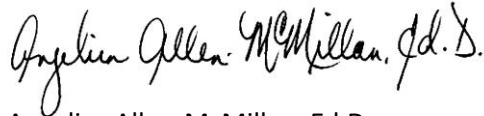
Joshua Bishop-Mbachu, President

Page 5

January 31, 2024

If you have questions, please contact Robert Gregory, executive director, Division of Field and Support Services at [Robert.Gregory@doe.nj.gov](mailto:Robert.Gregory@doe.nj.gov).

Sincerely,



Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D.

Acting Commissioner

AAM/CI/RG/O:Accountability/Renewals/2023-24 Renewals/Renewal Letters/Academy for Urban Leadership  
Charter School Renewal

c: Julie Bunt

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