



Great Schools for Connecticut Charter Schools Program Site Visit Report

School	Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)
Site Visit Date	April 21, 2025
Monitoring Team	Faiza Mawjee (GSCT Project Director) & Benjamin Feit (Consultant)

Purpose and Goals

The Connecticut Charter Schools Association (CTCSA) was awarded funds through the United States Department of Education's Charter Schools Program - State Entities (CSP-SE) program in 2022 to administer the Great Schools for Connecticut (GSCT) grant project. In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR § 200.332(d)), CTCSA engages in robust and comprehensive monitoring activities designed to ensure that all subgrantees are (1) implementing with fidelity the activities described in their applications, (2) meeting their project goals, and (3) adhering to federal rules and regulations.

To complement desk reviews of pertinent documentation compiled and submitted by subgrantees, CTCSA conducts periodic site visits to assess compliance with key programmatic, financial, and governance indicators. The purpose of the site visit is threefold: (1) to complement the desk review in allowing monitors to assess how grant-supported programs are being implemented and grant funds are being expended; (2) to identify areas of need in which technical assistance would be beneficial; and (3) to assist subgrantees as they transition toward planning for post-grant sustainability. Site visits consist of a physical inventory of non-consumable items purchased with CSP funds; observations of classroom instruction, school-wide systems, and health and safety protocols; and interviews with key stakeholders.

GSCT's site visit protocol is informed by the Department of Education's *Monitoring Handbook for State Entity Grantees*. In general, GSCT structures its site visits to assess compliance within three of the compliance indicators developed by the Department:

- Indicator 1.3: Definition of Charter School
- Indicator 2.3: Supporting Charter School Access and Model Diversity
- Indicator 3.2: Fiscal Control and Fund Accounting Procedures

Monitors also assess the degree to which subgrantees are implementing the key design elements outlined in their approved grant applications.

This Site Visit Report summarizes GSCT’s findings and recommendations and identifies any outstanding items that a subgrantee must address in order to remain in good standing. Noncompliance with any follow-up measures required by the GSCT team results in a subgrantee being identified as higher risk and, consequently, being subjected to heightened monitoring and, potentially, having subgrant awards reduced, suspended, or terminated. This report must be shared with a subgrantee’s Board of Trustees and made publicly available on a school’s website.

Summary of Findings

Indicator 1.2: Definition of Charter School

Compliance Status: In Compliance

The monitoring team looked for evidence of adherence to the federal definition of “charter school.” With respect to the requirement that the school adhere to federal and state regulations for health and safety, the monitoring team observed emergency exit plans posted in all classrooms; fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and AEDs throughout the school; an infirmary area with two full-time nurses; private counseling space; and a school gym that provides ample recreational space. With respect to the requirement that the school comply with federal civil rights and privacy statutes, the monitoring team observed a functional elevator that could be used to assist students or staff with mobility impairments and federal and state personnel policies (non-discrimination, leave, etc.) posted prominently in the staff break room. Related services for students with disabilities are provided by the New London School District; in the event that services are provided virtually, an ISAAC school support team member sits with the student receiving such services. No differences in treatment based on sex or gender were observed. The school conducts an independent financial audit completed on an annual basis. The school’s board reviews the draft audit findings, and school financials are posted publicly on the Connecticut State Department of Education website.

A new tower that will house students in Grades 4 and 5 was under construction at the time of the visit. The school's front access is not fully accessible, but there is a side entrance that could be used for students and staff with mobility impairments. The school's new tower has a temporary Certificate of Occupancy from New London and can be used for classes even as construction remains ongoing. Construction is expected to be complete by Fall 2025.

With respect to the requirement that the school utilize a random lottery to admit students when oversubscribed, monitors noted that the school’s application does not request any extraneous information (e.g., whether a student has a disability) and appears generally compliant with applicable regulations. The school reserves 50% of its seats for out-of-district students and engages with an independent third party to conduct its lottery. During the site visit, senior school officials made an oral representation that they set October 1 as an informal cut-off date after which they no longer enroll students during a given school year. Connecticut law requires charter

schools to "ensure open access on a space available basis, including the enrollment of students during the school year if spaces become available in the charter school." In response to a follow-up inquiry about whether the school's practices comport with this requirement, the school referred the monitoring team back to its board-approved admissions policy, which makes no mention of a cut-off date.

Indicator 2.3: Supporting Charter School Access and Model Diversity

Compliance Status: In Compliance

Monitors observed CSP-funded supplies and equipment being deployed within the school's currently operative expansion grade. Classrooms were clean, orderly, and uniquely configured with unconventional furniture that aligns with the flexible-seating model outlined in the school's CSP proposal. CSP-funded instructional materials were observed in use in Grade 4 classrooms and stored neatly in well-organized closet space. While the marine touch tank purchased with CSP funds was not yet in use, the monitoring team was able to observe tanks used by middle school students to understand how the equipment would be used in connection with the school's marine science curriculum. Monitors observed the pull-out classroom where supplemental instruction is provided to English Learners. School representatives stated that EL students are pulled from their general education classrooms at the same time each day at a time that typically coincides with science instruction. Special Education and EL teachers also push in to general education classrooms, with struggling students often grouped with students with disabilities during these push-ins in order to afford them additional individualized attention. The school's percentages of special education students, English Learners, and low-income students all exceed statewide averages.

Two of the districts from which students have applied for the 2025–26 instructional year (Franklin and Old Lyme) are classified as rural by the Connecticut Office of Rural Health. ISAAC has stated that enrolling students from rural districts remains a priority and that the purchase of two vans with CSP funds is designed to ease the commuting burden on families from rural settings that choose to enroll their students at ISAAC. The ISAAC team described partnerships with the Lyme Land Trust and the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center that afford students opportunities to engage in curriculum-aligned learning experiences in rural settings. Monitors observed the vans (which have been tagged appropriately) and reviewed redacted busing routes for the students in ISAAC's expansion grade who live at least seven miles away from the school and who would not be able to attend the school but for the access afforded by the vans.

Indicator 3.2: Fiscal Control and Fund Accounting Procedures

Compliance Status: In Compliance

Monitors conducted a physical inventory of items purchased with CSP funds. Furniture, technology, and instructional supplies were observed in use during classroom instruction in a CSP-supported expansion grade. The inventory report maintained by the ISAAC team was completed, and all items were appropriately tagged. Financial records, personnel files, payroll information, and petty cash are stored in a room with fireproof cabinets. Electronic backups of financial information are maintained on cloud servers. No unsecured items were observed in classrooms. An unsecured Promethean screen was observed in a hallway outside of a classroom in the portion of the facility that remains under construction. Although the ISAAC team stated that it would take multiple individuals to lift the screen and that the facility remains locked when unoccupied, the monitoring team noted that its location could render it susceptible to accidental damage. Shortly after the visit, the ISAAC team provided photographic evidence of the item having been moved into a secure location.

At the time of the visit, ISAAC maintained two separate inventory lists: one generated from Quickbooks and another maintained by the Director of Elementary Education. The Quickbooks version did not contain asset-tagging details, while the second list did not contain Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN). The GSCT team recommended that ISAAC merge the two lists into a single consolidated document with all information centralized in a single location. ISAAC complied with this request in a timely fashion.

Follow-Up From Desktop Monitoring

Compliance Status: In Progress

In addition to verifying compliance with the three indicators identified above, the monitoring used the site visit as an opportunity to follow up with ISAAC leadership about items from the GSCT Monitoring Rubric Google Sheet that remained open (i.e., Partially Met or Unmet). During the visit, the monitoring team verified that all open items on Tab 5 of the Monitoring Rubric Sheet (Fiscal Compliance) had been satisfactorily resolved. The monitoring team also observed classroom instruction to assess the degree to which the school's instructional methods facilitate high-quality teaching and learning. During the observation period, a teacher was observed facilitating small-group work and circulating among students who had paired off to complete a pencil-and-paper assignment. Lesson objectives were observed on whiteboards. Teachers articulated a process for checking for understanding and supporting students who struggled to master the concepts in any given lesson. The special education push-in model was described but not observed. The school administers nationally normed assessments on a quarterly basis. Upon request, the ISAAC team shared a professional development calendar, a Grade 4 assessment calendar, and the school's teacher evaluation tool. ISAAC also shared the "detailed plans to engage school stakeholders, particularly parents, students, teachers and administrators"

that the school was expected to submit to the state by July 8, 2024, in connection with the requirement in its renewal report that it take steps toward "improving school climate and minimizing behavioral incidents resulting in suspensions."

Several items on Tabs 4 (Programmatic Compliance) and 6 (Grant Governance) must be addressed prior to the conclusion of ISAAC's subgrant project period. Specifically, ISAAC must take the following measures in order to exit the grant in good standing:

- Verify that board members have attended required governance trainings.
- Demonstrate that its student population during the 2025–26 school year aligns with the enrollment plan set forth in its subgrant application. GSCT will verify this information when ISAAC submits its October 2025 enrollment information to CSDE.
- Complete the Annual Performance and Financial Reports within 90 days of the end of the subgrant budget period. ISAAC has established a SMART project goal that cannot be reported upon until the school's audited financial statement is available in January 2026. The school must report on progress toward all goals, including that financial measure, in a timely fashion.
- Post all monitoring reports on the school's website.