

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

June 18, 2026

Agenda Item: Choice Charter School Renewal Performance Report

State Board Goal: Goal 5

State Board Role/Authority: Per Iowa Code section 256E.10, the Iowa State Board of Education is responsible for monitoring each charter school's performance and compliance to determine whether the school's contract should be renewed up to and not to exceed five years.

Presenter(s): Tina Wahlert, Division Administrator
Division of PK-12 Learning

Barbara Ohlund, Executive Officer
Division of PK-12 Learning

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board approve Choice Charter School's Renewal Performance Report.

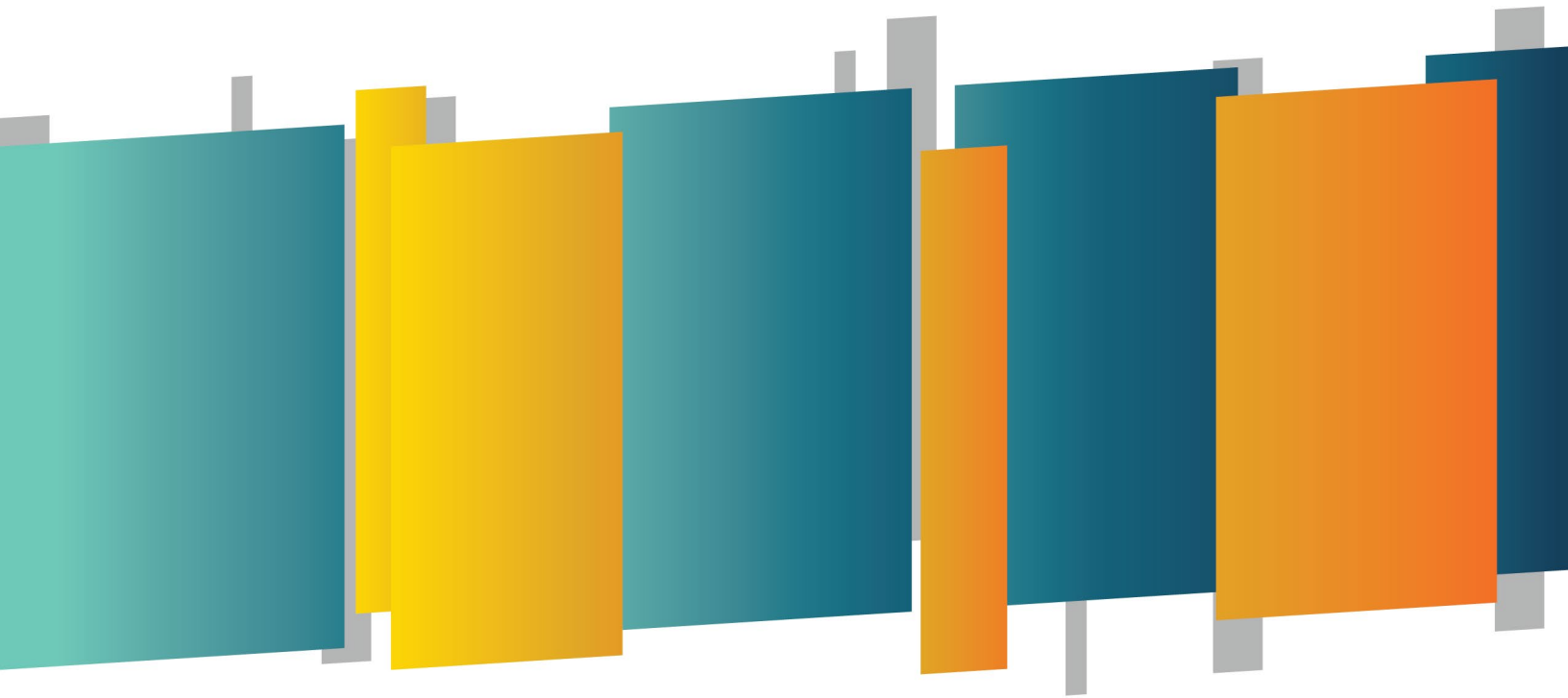
Background: Pursuant to Iowa Code section 256E.10, the State Board is required to issue the renewal performance report and renewal application guidance annually by June 30 to charter schools whose contracts will expire during the following school budget year. The charter school is then provided 60 days to respond to the report and submit any corrections or clarifications.

The required report synthesizes the school's performance data and identifies any concerns. The renewal performance report is organized into four main categories: (1) Academic Performance, (2) Operations and Governance Performance, (3) Finance Performance and (4) Supplemental Data.

Choice Charter School Renewal Performance Report

A report issued by the Iowa State Board of Education

June 18, 2026



State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

State Board of Education

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Administration

McKenzie Snow, Director and Executive Officer of the State Board of Education

Division of PK-12 Learning

Tina Wahlert, Division Administrator
Barbara Ohlund, Executive Officer

Bureau of School Improvement

Joanne Tubbs, Bureau Chief
Kyle Morin, Administrative Consultant
Tom Bredfield, Consultant
Stacie Stokes, Consultant

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Choice Charter School

Location: Statewide Virtual Platform

Grades: 7-12

Education Service Provider: N/A

Required Actions

- Submit updated Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Action Plan targeting student growth and achievement.
- Submit plan to support student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism rates.
- Submit plan to support student test participation expectations.
- Submit a narrative addressing each of the concerns noted by the auditor in the FY25 audit's Management Letter.
- Provide Iowa State Board of Education (State Board)–requested 2025–26 data on credit accrual, General Educational Development (GED) attainment and student mobility.
- Discontinue administration-directed board selection practices; develop independent selection protocols.
- Submit updated school admissions policy documentation.
- Update Lau Plan to include required Home Language Survey (HLS) questions and Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) details.
- Submit narrative addressing repeated audit findings, why they were experienced and remediation plans.

Continuous Improvement Recommendations

- Continue support of currently unmet charter specific goals.
- Continue engagement and collaboration with Iowa Department of Education (Department) staff.
- For the governing board, conduct independent professional development needs assessment, review conflict of interest policies and pursue balanced expertise in board recruitment.
- Monitor staff understanding and clarity regarding improvement initiative expectations and timelines.
- Continue to monitor and implement actions supporting staff retention.

Table 1: Performance Assessment Scores¹

Category	Percent
Academics	20%
Operations and Governance	77%
Finance	56%
Supplemental Data	49%
Overall Performance	45%

Table 2: Performance Assessment Scoring Summary

Level	% points earned	Performance Description
5	90-100%	This level indicates one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School data is exceeding expectation. • Document review and school visit results identify no corrective actions. • Performance is at low risk and limited concern.
4	80-89%	This level indicates one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School data is meeting expectation. • Document review and school visit results identify no or limited minor corrective actions. • Performance is at low risk and limited concern.
3	70-79%	This level indicates one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School data is slightly below expectation. • Document review and school visit results identify corrective and/or continuous improvement actions that need response over time. • Performance is at slight risk and concern.
2	60-69%	This level indicates one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School data is below expectation. • Document review and school visit results identify substantial corrective actions that need immediate and ongoing response. • Performance is at moderate risk and concern.
1	<59%	This level indicates one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School data is significantly below expectation. • Document review and school visit results identify critical corrective actions that need immediate response. • Performance is at high risk and substantial concern.

¹ For more information about Performance Framework criteria, refer to this [document](#).

Introduction

Under Iowa Code section 256E.10, the State Board determines whether a charter contract should be renewed for up to five years based on evidence of school performance under the charter contract, including academic, operations and governance and financial performance. This evidence is gathered through the performance assessment and site visit process and culminates in individual charter Renewal Performance Reports issued by the State Board on June 30 for each charter up for renewal. Schools submit a charter response, including a response to required and recommended actions, additional evidence of achievements, improvements and proposed plans for the next contract term within 60 days of receiving the report. Next, schools submit a Charter Renewal Application, including their charter response, by October 1. Upon receipt of the application, the State Board has 60 days, or until December 1, to issue a final renewal decision by formal resolution, including the rationale for approval, conditional renewal or revocation. High-performing schools in full compliance may qualify for expedited renewal.

The charter school renewal process provides a comprehensive evaluation of a school’s performance, integrating quantitative data, qualitative observations and stakeholder perspectives. The six steps are detailed in **Table 3. Renewal Process Timeline**.

Table 3: Renewal Process Timeline

Step 1 Performance Assessment	Step 2 Site Visit	Step 3 Renewal Performance Report	Step 4 Charter Response	Step 5 Charter Renewal Application	Step 6 State Board Decision
March	April	May-June (6/30)	July-August (8/30)	September- October (10/1)	November- December (12/1)
Purpose: Evaluate the school’s academic, operational and financial performance to identify strengths, concerns and areas for improvement that inform renewal decisions.	Purpose: Gather qualitative evidence and assess how the school implements its mission and operations in practice.	Purpose: Synthesize performance assessment data and site visit findings into a clear review of strengths, concerns and key evidence for renewal decision-making.	Purpose: Require the school to submit a written response addressing its individual Renewal Performance Report issued by the State Board.	Purpose: Require the school to submit a renewal application that includes its response to the individual Renewal Performance Report issued by the State Board.	Purpose: Determine whether to renew, renew with corrective action or revoke the charter contract based on the evidence presented.

Note: The charter school renewal process doesn’t replace other compliance monitoring, review or accountability processes at the Department.

The Department’s renewal process team is responsible for reviewing performance assessment data, identifying areas of inquiry for the site visit process, participating in site visits and reviewing and revising the Renewal Performance Report prior to its presentation to the State Board. **Table 4: Renewal Process Team Members** identifies the Department personnel involved in the charter renewal process and their respective roles and responsibilities.

Table 4: Renewal Process Team Members

DOE Member	Position	Division
Tom Bredfield	Education Program Consultant	School Improvement
Kassandra Cline	Bureau Chief School Business Operations	Chief of Staff
Stephanie Edler	Administrative Consultant	School Business Operations
Kyle Morin	Administrative Consultant	School Improvement
Barbara Ohlund	Executive Officer 4	PK-12 Learning Division
Rachel Pettigrew	Education Program Consultant	Elementary and Secondary Education Act Programs
Eden Sexton	Education Program Consultant	School Improvement
Stacie Stokes	Education Program Consultant	School Improvement
Wendy Trotter	Administrative Consultant	Student Evaluation, Instruction and Services

Renewal Performance Report Structure

The performance assessment is organized into four main categories:

1. Academic Performance
2. Operations and Governance Performance
3. Finance Performance
4. Supplemental Data

The following are the results (Background, Key Points, Strengths, Compliance Corrective Actions, Recommendations for Continuous Improvement) for each category of the performance assessment reviewed during the renewal process.

Academic Performance

Background

This section includes review of the school's current ESSA designation on its Iowa School Performance Profile, the attainment of their charter-specific goals, information from classroom observations conducted during the school visit and findings from focus group interviews with students, prospective students, leadership, instructional staff, support staff, the governing board and parents.

Choice Charter School is a statewide virtual charter school serving grades 7-12. It serves a student population previously at risk of dropping out of school and whose current instructional model doesn't align with personal academic or behavioral needs. Its mission is to provide a student-centered alternative public education, embedding mentoring, individualized student support and skills needed to prepare students for their future. Highlights of the school include:

- **Personalized Learning:** Integration of learning strengths, student choice, interests and needs to create personalized learning
- **Student Value:** Recognition of the value of each student and the unique circumstances brought to the learning environment
- **Curriculum:** Cross-curricular academic programming
- **Project Based:** Focus on competency, project-based education

Individualized support at Choice Charter School fosters a strong sense of connection and trust between students and staff. Students reported appreciating the flexibility, understanding, and responsiveness staff demonstrate toward their personal circumstances, learning preferences, and identified needs. Students and parents described barriers to learning in previous educational settings, and noted significant improvements and stronger alignment with their educational needs since enrolling at Choice Charter School. This approach has enabled students to identify, articulate and pursue their postsecondary aspirations with the support of school staff. Students and parents attributed the school's positive culture to the dedication, support and care demonstrated by the administration and teaching staff.

Academic Key Points

- Innovative online education platform with multiple layers of support designed to meet the unique needs of each student
- Charter Goal Achievement: 50% (2/4 goals met, FY26)
- *Iowa School Performance Profile Ranking: **Priority***

Strengths

Currently designated as "Comprehensive Year 2" on Iowa's ESSA accountability index (ESSA-CSI), the school has received support from Department staff beginning in the 2024-25 school year. As part of this support, the school engages in ongoing continuous improvement actions with direct collaboration from the Department. Choice Charter School has demonstrated a high level of responsiveness to state recommendations and has made systemic changes to better support students academically, behaviorally and socially-emotionally within their virtual learning platform.

The school implemented and refined several new support systems intended to improve student engagement, attendance and academic success, including SCALE onboarding/orientation, RISE I, RISE II, expanded mentor systems, study shifts, flipped instructional supports, intervention structures and increased Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) monitoring processes. These initiatives are guided by the leadership team's ongoing data reflection and refinement of implementation practices.

The school invested significantly in professional learning, walkthrough processes, coaching structures, instructional redesign conversations and alignment of curriculum and assessment practices. The Choice Charter School team also demonstrated strong commitment to improving support for students with disabilities through collaboration with IDEA-DA partners, integration of special education support into MTSS planning, Specially Designed Instruction discussions and intentional planning around career-connected learning for students with individualized education programs (IEPs).

Students and parents highlighted the school's role in helping students feel more engaged and motivated to attend school - an experience many did not have in previous settings. Staff provided multiple examples of how the school's core values are reflected in daily student support—academically, behaviorally and emotionally. Participants largely attributed this alignment to the leadership team's communication and strategic use of data.

Compliance Corrective Actions

The following corrective actions were identified during the performance assessment process for immediate remediation:

Choice Charter School received its "Priority" and ESSA "Comprehensive" designation in the 2024-25 school year, placing it in the fifth percentile statewide. Choice Charter School serves a significant at-risk student population who require academic intervention and credit recovery. Iowa School Performance Profile data show overall points declined from 38.55% in FY24 to 23.84% in FY25. Academic growth rates fell below the state average (50%) in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics: ELA growth dropped from 52.5% in FY24 to 29.5% in FY25 and mathematics growth from 35% in FY24 to 27.5% in FY25.

Required Action: Provide an updated ESSA Action Plan to the Department Charter School Team that outlines steps targeting improvement in student growth and achievement.

Past data indicates an increase in the chronic absenteeism rate, rising from 51.37% in FY24 to 82.73% in FY25 (state averages 21.63% and 15.81%, respectively). Choice Charter School's attendance growth data for students who were chronically absent in the prior school year was -5.05%.

Required Action: Implement Iowa Code section 299.12 with fidelity regarding chronic absenteeism. Provide a plan to the Department Charter School Team detailing the strategies that will be implemented to reduce the chronic absenteeism rate on par with the state average of 15.81%.

Past data show Choice Charter School's composite student participation rates in the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) or Systematic Learning Maps (DLM) alternate assessment is 47.42%, compared to the state average of 99.31%—approximately a 7% decrease from FY24 to FY25. ELA participation was 47.62% (state average: 99.36%), while mathematics was 47.19% (state average of 99.31%), each representing an approximate 10% decrease from FY24 to FY25.

Required Action: Provide a plan to the Department Charter School Team detailing the strategies that will be implemented to meet the mandatory 95% participation threshold.

Choice Charter School administration appeared before the State Board on November 19, 2025, to discuss attendance and student participation in assessments. As a result of the meeting, President John Robbins and members of the State Board requested the following local school data: credit accrual, student GED attainment and student mobility. Related Iowa School Performance Profile data indicate the four-year graduation rate declined by approximately 14% between the 2022–23 and 2023–24 academic years (AY 22-23 and AY 23-24), from 37.1% (state average 87.46%) to 31.9% (state average 88.27%). The five-year graduation rate, reported for AY 23–24, was 54.29%—below the state average of 88.27%.

Required Action: Provide the requested local AY 25-26 data to the State Board:

1. The percent of students on track for graduation (credit accrual).
2. The percent of students who earn enough credits from Choice Charter School and subsequently return to their resident school.
3. The percent of Choice Charter School students who received their GED.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Annual reporting data indicates that the charter school successfully attained two of the four school-specific goals which included maintaining a positive school culture and improving communication with families on student progress and success (data pertaining to one goal unavailable at the time of reporting). The remaining goals that were unmet include:

- Continuing improvement in academic learning on the ISASP by increasing the participation of students taking the ISASP from 49% to 80% and continuing the progress of 5% growth on scale score of the cohort student group in ELA, mathematics and science.
- Continuing efforts to increase the number of students on track for graduation through the implementation of Individual Success Plans.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School is encouraged to continue support of the remaining goals through implementing data-based interventions targeting attendance, academic performance and progress towards graduation. Additional monitoring and data analysis protocols centered around student growth rates in standards mastery is also recommended in order to identify and track all growth achieved while enrolled at Choice Charter School.

Recommendation: Continue current collaboration with the Department's ESSA consultants. It is recommended that progress be evaluated quarterly and the school action plan is updated in the areas of student growth, credit accrual, attendance, chronic absenteeism and intervention effectiveness.

Operations and Governance Performance

Background

This section includes review of the school's submitted artifacts indicating the adoption and implementation of key governance, operational, special education and English learner policies and procedures. The school's IDEA-DA designation, student retention rate, classroom observations and focus group interviews with the governing board, leadership, instructional and support staff, parents and students are also represented.

Choice Charter School operates exclusively via their virtual learning platform: Charterverse. The school is currently overseen by five governing board members. The governing board has adopted bylaws and policies aligned with the school's mission and vision of student support and postsecondary aspirations.

The charter school has a current IDEA-DA Designation of Level 2. In collaboration with Department staff, Choice Charter School leadership has demonstrated a strong receptiveness to ongoing feedback and implementation of best practices through regular communication with Department staff, participation in ongoing planning meetings, timely revision of action plans and proactive efforts to seek guidance and clarification regarding state expectations and accountability requirements.

Operations and Governance Key Points

- Governance (18/18) and operations (31/34) criteria requirements met
- Detailed policies and procedures aligned with the school's mission and vision, including clear protocols to identify, disclose and address potential conflicts of interest among governing board members
- Governing board members interview with the school's chief executive officer and undergo reference checks by the chief executive before joining the board
- Student retention rate - 62%
- *IDEA-DA Designation: **Level 2***

Strengths

Document review confirms the governing board's compliance with current policy, including open meetings, public records and code of ethics. Policies demonstrate strong alignment with the school's mission, vision and instructional practices. The governing board reviews data from leadership—including satisfaction surveys, student supports and assessment results—to analyze student performance.

Documented protocols and focus group responses described a dynamic, individualized approach to student support. The student population attending Choice Charter School includes many students with backgrounds of trauma, disengagement, interrupted schooling, attendance challenges and credit recovery needs, which shape both instructional practices and improvement efforts. This includes frequent internal discussions among staff as well as collaboration with school leadership regarding best practices to address identified academic or behavioral needs. Multiple staff affirmed that the school leadership is supportive of teacher autonomy, creativity, skill sets and personal needs. Teachers also reported that staff feedback is prioritized by Choice Charter School's leadership, with staff members completing exit tickets at the end of weekly staff meetings. These responses are reviewed and discussed by the school's leadership team to inform ongoing practice and future training implications.

This personalized approach to learning extends to services for students with disabilities and those with English language needs. Choice Charter School submitted all required documentation including the Special Education Service Delivery and Lau Plan. For students transitioning into the school with a preexisting IEP, staff review the existing plan, collaborate with the local area education agency (AEA), analyze data and collaboratively determine the best support for the student in transition to the virtual learning environment.

Compliance Corrective Actions

The following corrective actions were identified during the performance assessment process for immediate remediation:

School visit results indicated governing board practices that pose potential impact on the board's independence, duty of leadership support and administrative oversight. Current board candidates, including recent members, were required to interview with the school's chief executive officer (CEO) and complete a reference check in order to be eligible for membership. The selection of governing board members by the same administrator the board is responsible for overseeing impacts its ability to operate independently.

Required Action: Change current governing board practices:

- Discontinue current recruitment practice requiring interview with—and approval from—current administrative staff.
- Develop and conduct independent governing board recruitment procedures.

The school admissions policy did not meet the required criteria. There was no evidence of a formally adopted school policy by the governing board, and detailed description of student enrollment processes and procedures were not included within the student handbook or as part of the application information listed on the school website.

Required Action: Update, adopt and submit school admissions policy to the Department Charter School Team.

Document review and school visit interviews revealed that the school's HLS for English learners and components of the LIEP included in the Lau Plan are out of compliance.

Required Action: Use the required HLS and parent notification forms available on the TransACT website at the time of student enrollment and when communicating with families to ensure compliance with Department requirements. The HLS and the Lau Plan's description of the HLS must include the following three questions:

1. What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?
2. What is the language most often spoken by the student?
3. What is the language that the student first acquired?

Required Action: The LIEP in the Lau Plan must specifically detail the following:

- How students enrolled in a program for English learners receive systematic English language instruction designed to allow meaningful access to the district's educational programs (Iowa Administrative Code chapter 281.60) within a virtual instructional model.
- Alignment with the Department's approved LIEP Instructional Program types outlined in the Student Reporting in Iowa Data Dictionary.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

It was reported that governing board onboarding, professional development needs and subsequent learning sessions were directed by the CEO, highlighting an opportunity for the continued development of independent governance structures.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School's governing board is encouraged to conduct an independent assessment of its current training needs and engage in ongoing professional development specific to charter school governance.

Choice Charter School's governing board includes a school staff member, which may present potential conflicts of interest related to the board's oversight responsibilities for school administration.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School is encouraged to regularly review and monitor clear conduct and conflict of interest policies while multi-role members actively serve on the governing board.

School data and interviews indicated that there is transience in the student population (62% student retention rate). In addition, staff indicated that barriers have developed within the continuous improvement initiatives. Staff reported that while school administration is open and willing to embrace new ideas and instructional approaches, the volume and pacing surrounding these improvement initiatives have led to staff feeling confused and overwhelmed. Internal communication surrounding changing initiatives, new protocols and expectations was also reported to be inconsistent across staff roles.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School is encouraged to monitor staff understanding and implementation regarding improvement initiatives to ensure staff are clear on expectations, timelines and individual roles. These data could be used for individual staff coaching and support during the different phases of the improvement process.

Choice Charter School has a current IDEA-DA designation of Level 2 and is currently collaborating with the Department.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School is encouraged to continue to participate in IDEA-DA Level 2 supports and activities to continue to improve educational results and functional outcomes for all students with disabilities.

Finance Performance

This section includes review of the results from the school's most recent annual audit, financial performance over the charter term, five-year projected budget and actual student enrollment rates compared to projections. Findings from focus group interviews with school administration and financial officers are also represented.

Finance Key Points

- The Certified Annual Report was submitted timely to the Department in FY23, FY24 and FY25.
- The Annual Transportation Report for FY25 was not previously required.
- The annual audit report was filed timely in FY24.
 - The audit report was not filed timely in FY23 and FY25.
 - The school did not meet the requirement to conduct an annual audit as the FY23 and FY24 audits were completed simultaneously.

Compliance Corrective Actions

The following corrective actions were identified during the performance assessment process for immediate remediation:

Required Action: Submit a narrative addressing each of the repeat audit findings, including the district's understanding of why the audit findings were experienced and the work being done to address systemic issues and district processes to address each finding.

Financial Reporting and Audit Findings

Annual audits are required by March 31 following the close of the fiscal year to the Auditor of State and the Department. Choice Charter School did not submit the FY23, FY24 or FY25 annual audit to the Auditor of State.

The Department has not received the school's FY25 audit. However, a management letter from the auditor was submitted that recognized multiple issues, which may result in findings in the final audit.

- Internal controls over financial reporting
 - Billings
 - Accrued transactions
 - Grants
 - Contributions
 - Contracts
- Incorrect presentation of financial position, results of operations, cash flows and financial statement disclosures
- Receivable accounts not timely reconciled or recorded

The audit report does not include a section for audit findings for FY23 or FY24 so it is unclear if the auditor found any instances of noncompliance.

Five-Year Projection

- The school did not provide a projected ending balance from FY26, so the beginning balance of FY27 is unknown.
 - It is unclear how the FY27 beginning balance would change the remainder of the projected values.
- The school is projecting an increasingly positive balance over the five years.
- The district's fund balance at the end of FY25 was \$453,058.

Table 5: Five-Year Projections

Five-Year Projections	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
Projected Staff	33.5	37.64	40.38	43.38	46.63
Projected Enrollment	335	370	405	440	475
Total Revenue	\$3,378,084	\$3,771,561	\$4,130,479	\$4,496,406	\$4,869,452
Total Expenditures	\$3,002,715	\$3,640,364	\$4,015,537	\$4,381,971	\$4,794,930
Net Revenue/Expenditures	\$375,369	\$131,197	\$114,942	\$114,435	\$74,522
Prior Year Surplus/Deficit	Not Reported	\$375,369	\$506,566	\$621,508	\$735,943
Remaining Balance	\$375,369	\$506,566	\$621,508	\$735,943	\$810,465

Supplemental Data

Background

This section includes review of the school's current staff retention, properly licensed and endorsed teachers and areas of expertise of the current governing board members.

Supplemental Data Key Points

- Multiple governing board members have expertise in the education of at-risk youth.
- Ninety-seven percent of Choice Charter School instructors hold proper endorsements in their field of instruction.

Strengths

Members of the current governing board have extensive educational expertise. This includes teaching experience in agriculture, GED acquisition, science, reading and mathematics. Additionally, members of the board have experience serving and supporting at-risk student populations via High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) programs, foster care systems and trauma support professional development. The collective knowledge of the board reinforces the strong commitment and dedication to serving the student population who might not succeed in traditional school settings and require unique support in their learning.

School visit and data review findings indicate that, over the past three years, all but one relevant teaching staff held appropriate certification and endorsements for their course work. This indicates that school administration protocols regarding monitoring of staff licensure are largely effective.

Compliance Corrective Actions

The school has no compliance corrective actions in this area.

Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

The governing board's background expertise is primarily centralized around education, which is an asset in the support of student learning needs. However, the current membership of the governing board has limited representation across areas such as education policy, finance and operations, which may present challenges in the ongoing management and sustainability of the charter school.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School's governing board is encouraged to conduct governing board recruitment to gain membership with balanced background expertise across academics, education policy, operations and school finance.

Staff satisfaction surveys are currently used, with data collected and reviewed by school administration. However, despite the use of surveys, data from FY25 indicates a staff retention rate of 62.5%, which may impact the ability to implement and sustain successful continuous improvement actions.

Recommendation: Choice Charter School is encouraged to conduct an internal audit of barriers to staff retention and use the findings to inform continuous improvement planning. School leadership is also encouraged to provide ongoing monitoring and targeted strategies to improve staff retention rates.

Appendices

1. **Renewal Process and Performance Assessment Overview**
 - A brief description of the full charter school renewal process, including criteria from the adopted performance framework and the corresponding rubric used in the performance assessment.

2. **Charter Renewal Application Guidance**
 - A companion document for charter schools seeking renewal, including guidance on completing the application form and instructions for the formal school response to the Renewal Performance Report issued by the State Board.