

## 1. Executive Summary

Tunbridge Public Charter School (TCPS), governed by Afya Baltimore, Inc. (ABI), seeks an extension to its current contract, set to expire June 30, 2015. The governing board of ABI believes that the school has performed effectively—or better—in each of the key areas assessed in the renewal process and therefore has earned the longest contract extension possible: five years.

This renewal application outlines our progress and performance in the following areas: academic performance, school culture and climate, and management and oversight practices. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this application will focus on and forecast the work ahead for TPCS and for ABI over the next five years.

With respect to academic performance, which for the purposes of the renewal process is assessed by the results of the MSA from 2010 through 2013 and through the School Effectiveness Review (SER) team’s site visit and subsequent formal report, Tunbridge performed in a Highly Effective manner in several significant areas, including absolute and trend performance on the state assessment and, on the SER, the teachers’ ability to establish classroom environments where quality teaching and learning can prosper. The school certainly has room to improve, especially in some of its instructional systems, including its approaches to using data to adjust and inform practice. Still, in many ways and based on multiple measurements, the school’s academic performance during its first four years has been impressive.

The climate and culture of the school are outstanding. The SER team noted this by rating Tunbridge Highly Effective in two of the three categories in this area. School leaders and teachers have, from the inception, prided themselves on creating a place that is welcoming to students and families alike, full of opportunities to learn and grow and participate in the mission of the school. There are various data points that indicate climate and culture are strengths of the school, including high attendance rates and low rates of chronic absenteeism, a low suspension rate, and positive responses from the different surveys that are used in conjunction with this renewal process. This information will be discussed in detail in this application.

Financial management and oversight of the school will also be thoroughly discussed. Again, in these key areas the school and the governing organization have obvious strengths. In two of the four categories in this area of the work Tunbridge and ABI were found to be Highly Effective by the

SER team. Organizational leaders, including the board and the executive director, have worked together for eight years now. Throughout this time ABI has a proven record of financial oversight, excellent management practices, and planning that is effective and forward thinking.

Based on its first four years of performance, there is no doubt that Tunbridge has earned a full five-year renewal. The big question is what comes next. There will be some short-term things that the school addresses based on conversations the board and school leaders have had over the last year and based on feedback from the SER team. Our new middle school, for example, is a clear focus of our attention. This summer we've completed construction on new space for our middle grades students. This project has presented many financial and operational challenges for the board and its leadership— all of which have been met. The work now, the essential work, is to create programming for students (we currently have sixth and seventh graders) that is rigorous and challenging. Simply stated: We want the Tunbridge middle school to be the school of choice for our elementary students. During our first two years, an average of 82 percent of our fifth graders have matriculated to the middle school. We want to increase this percentage to 90 percent, and then maintain this. To do this we need to create a program that is both rich in academics and replete with opportunities for students to learn and grow socially, emotionally, physically, and artistically.

We have other shorter-term goals. We want to infuse much more technology into our programming, including ways for parents to more easily engage in their students' learning through web-based interactions with teachers. We are also committed to investing in our library so that Tunbridge students of all ages have access to a wide range of books and information that will inform their learning and broaden their perspective on the world.

The longer-term work that we have will focus on two areas. First, we have to continue and broaden our commitment to curriculum development and assessment. The Common Core presents many challenges for school communities. Tunbridge and ABI need to respond with plans to create and implement curriculum at a much higher level. Additionally, we'll be working to have curriculum and program continuity between Tunbridge and our sister school, Afya Public Charter School (APCS). (APCS is located in the Belair-Edison neighborhood and successfully renewed its charter in 2012.) We are currently contemplating replicating Tunbridge PCS's model with another city elementary school. To do this, we need to ensure that our approach to instruction at TPCS and APCS is consistently rigorous, systematic and supported with quality teacher effectiveness and training.

The second area of growth over the next five years will be related to our board development. A strength for Tunbridge has been the ABI board, which has been stable and supportive. The board envisions becoming a more strategic-based entity, a group committed to longer-term planning and building of infrastructure. The board is also contemplating re-structuring to further support the schools in the areas of fundraising and grant-seeking.

Ultimately in this application we plan to show that our past performance has earned us future opportunities. We think this application shows that while we are proud of our performance we recognize that we have much to improve upon. We trust that reviewers of our application, including the CEO and school board members, agree and give us this opportunity over the next five years.

## **2. Is the School an Academic Success?**

a. Please summarize the school's absolute and trend in performance over the current contract term, including any considerations relevant to evaluating and understanding the school's performance.

Over the course of the contract term, 87 percent of Tunbridge students earned proficient or advanced on the MSA and 90 percent of students reached proficiency or higher in mathematics. The school ranked in the 89th percentile in reading and the 94th percentile in mathematics in Baltimore City. The school earned a Highly Effective rating in this area on the scoring rubric.

In both reading and mathematics, student performance trended upward over the term of the contract, rising from 81 to 86 percent in mathematics and 87 to 90 percent in reading. According to the rubric, this upward trend earns the school a developing score. We don't find this data concerning, however, as the school started at a high level of performance and rose from there; the increase simply wasn't dramatic enough to score higher on the rubric—and then, of course, we've been transitioning away from the MSA. Had the MSA continued to be the tool used to assess trend, the goal of the school would have been to reach absolute performance of 90 percent or above and then maintain that annually throughout the term of the next contract, giving us a Highly Effective rating. With the switch to PARCC assessments, we'll have to determine what it takes to reach Highly Effective in this area, which is our objective.

The school uses the results from absolute performance on the MSA and the trends that we see in the data to improve student performance in two significant ways. First, the data drive the curriculum decisions that we are making, and the related professional development, in broad ways. In mathematics, for example, where we saw a six percentage point increase from 2011 to 2013, we

assessed after our first year that our mathematics curriculum needed more rigor and consistency. We committed to overhauling our focus on mathematics during that summer, and worked with a consultant to guide teachers in planning and assessment creation. This work continued throughout the school year through comprehensive professional development, something the SER team noted that Tunbridge does in an engaging and effective way (page 12). The impact on academic performance was realized the following two years as student performance increased. Additionally, this data drives conversations that teachers have during weekly curriculum planning meetings, guiding decisions about what will be taught and how on a daily basis. This process will be discussed in more detail later in this application.

b. Please summarize the school's academic performance and discuss any data trends, achievement gaps and other considerations relevant to evaluating and understanding the school's performance.

When assessing the Tunbridge MSA data in terms of achievement gaps we find no glaring concerns. The tables do show a four percentage point drop in special education reading performance, from 75 to 71 percent from 2011 to 2013. The data also show a closing of the achievement gap between African-American and White students. After the first year, there was a 33 percentage point gap in mathematics and a 16 percentage point gap in reading. By the third year, the gaps had been reduced to 14 percentage points in mathematics and 11 percentage points. This is a positive trend, though given the sampling size it's difficult to infer too much. The same can be said about the special education data.

Because of the small sample sizes, the school hasn't really used the MSA data to address gaps in performance. Still, since the opening of the school in 2010, we've challenged ourselves to have a school that meets the needs of all students and we've used various data sources to learn about student performance and respond to it. These will be discussed in the paragraph below and later in the application in section 2. i. iii.

c. Please summarize the school's academic growth over the current contract term, including any considerations relevant to evaluating and understanding the school's performance.

The school earned a Highly Effective rating with respect to academic growth performance over the term of the contract. The school uses various strategies to identify and assist students on an individual or small cohort basis to improve academic performance from one year to the next. In reading, for example, Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking assessments are used to level students. These assessments are given throughout the year and teachers and administrators track reading level

progress and make instructional adjustments, which often occur in small-group guided reading time. Students are also grouped based on need during word study time. We use the Words Their Way program for this work and group students within and across grade levels accordingly. Finally, for reading, the school uses Wireless assessment data to gauge student progress and make necessary instructional adjustments.

In mathematics the school also provides interventions and enrichment through small group instruction and re-grouping. We use teacher-made assessments to do this, as well as reporting from the Stanford 10 assessments for students in grades one and two. We've been especially focused on our current fifth grade cohort in this regard. This group entered Tunbridge as first graders as our lowest performing cohort of students. Because of this, we've responded by keeping the groupings smaller in this grade and adding increasing interventions, including tutoring and added time on task for practice. Because of these interventions, this cohort has performed on the MSA as consistently well as other groups of students in the school.

d. College and Career Readiness (for Transformation Schools and High Schools)

NA

e. Graduation Rate (for Transformation Schools and High Schools)

NA

f. Drop Out Rate (for Transformation Schools and High Schools only)

NA

g. For schools using NWEA data to measure student absolute performance, trend and growth.

NA

h. Discuss how the school has performed against the performance measures and expectations specified in its contract and in comparison to City Schools' performance during the same period.

Over the course of the contract term, Tunbridge has met or exceeded its contract goals with respect to MSA. In its first year, 2011, the school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Thereafter, when MSDE changed its performance classification from AYP to the School Performance Index, the school earned the rating of 1, the highest possible.

Tunbridge has exceeded the performance of City Schools during the term of the contract. The reading and mathematics composite score for City Schools in grade three in 2011 was 71.4. The composite score for Tunbridge third graders that year, our first, was 84.0. In 2012, the composite score for City Schools in grades three and four was 76.8. The composite score for Tunbridge third and fourth graders that year was 87.0. In 2013, the composite score for City Schools in grades three through five was 70.9. The composite score for Tunbridge students in the same grades that year was 88.0. For the corresponding grades, then, over the course of the contract, the composite score for City Schools was 73.0, compared to 86.0 for Tunbridge.\*

i. Discuss how the school uses data to inform decisions regarding instruction, curriculum, school programs, professional development and/or other school components.

The school uses data to inform all decisions related to instruction, curriculum, school programming, professional development, and mission-related components.

i. What systems or processes, if any, does the school use to review and analyze data?

To make these decisions, the school uses specific processes and protocols. First, data is collected and shared. Groups of teachers and/or administrators then assess the data, looking at trends, tracking individual, grade-level, and school-wide performance. Action planning then takes place and the work of improving student performance proceeds.

The school is structured to support this work and includes groups such as the school leadership team (consisting of the executive director of ABI, school leaders, and founding teachers), and the Collaborative Teacher Teams (consisting of cross-grade-level teacher partnerships), which work together to assess data and solve problems.

ii. What types of data do school leaders and teachers analyze? How does the school use data to assess the effectiveness of school practices and programs?

As they do this work, school leaders and teachers use the following data to inform decision making: Wireless data, teacher-created fluency tests, math journals, completion of the problem of the day, teacher-created rubrics, class-created exit tickets, Words Their Way (data analysis spreadsheets), and Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels. Measures used to track socio-emotional goals include: quarterly socio-emotional report cards which monitor how students take care of others and the classroom environment, participation, group work, application of PAX

---

\* See [mdreportcard.org](http://mdreportcard.org)

lessons (lessons created by the PAX Institute to teach and promote positive behavior), in class behavior charts, and demerit tracking sheets related to student behavior. (See Appendix I for more information about the Paths to PAX program.)

Each teacher keeps a data binder that has three sections:

- A section **for each child** to include individual student reports, baseline assessments, getting-to-know-you documents, conferencing notes, goals sheets, anecdotal notes and observations.
- A section to collect class data reports for:
  - All content areas:
    - Reading levels
    - Fact fluency
    - Spelling inventory/vocabulary development
    - Math unit tests
    - Content assessments
  - Results from quarterly assessments
  - Samples of the end of unit assessment along with the class scores and reflections
- A section that includes documentation from small group instruction. (This is a new section, inspired in part by the SER report that suggested that not enough teachers at the school could clearly articulate in their planning what they were doing to address the needs of individual learners.)

Here is an example of how the school uses data to assess the effectiveness of practice: In September 2013 we gave all of our students a grade level reading assessment. In grade three, 33 of 69 students were at grade level (48 percent). The third grade team immediately went to work, analyzing the data for trends and organizing groupings so students could work in small, homogeneous groups during word study time and then again during guided reading time. Teachers identified texts that students would read and study during these intervention times, as

well as areas of focus for word acquisition and vocabulary development. The principal worked with teachers in all of this planning and then monitored and provided feedback on instructional practice. The result was that when the assessment was given again at the end of the year, 67 percent of students had reached the target. An interesting point to note here is that this year the Fountas and Pinnell grade level targets, which we used for grade three, four and five, were adjusted up to reflect more rigorous text complexity coinciding with the Common Core. Thus, because of rigorous data analysis and instruction, student performance rose even in the face of higher standards. (See Appendix II for data from all grades.)

iii. How does individual student achievement data inform student interventions and differentiation?

Just as data is used in broad ways to inform decision-making, performance information is used to make decisions about individual students. A specific example of this kind of data analysis resulting in change at Tunbridge is connected to the work of the CTTs and our assessment walls. The assessment wall is used as a visual representation of student progress in reading. Each student in the school is represented on the wall with a sticky note (we use different colors for each grade) and student progress is tracked throughout the year.

That's the concept. In practice it looks like this: Teachers come together and update reading levels of each student, based on results from Fountas and Pinnell assessments or the Wireless assessment. As they do this, the different sticky notes, which represent individual students, are moved along the continuum, giving teachers a visual glimpse of individual progress and group trends. Individual strugglers can then easily be identified, as can high-performing students. To further understand an individual's or small group of students' struggles, teachers then look at running records to find specific deficiencies. Next, interventions are planned and guided reading groups are created. Specific goals are put in place for each student, goals that are revisited the next time the group meets to move students along the assessment wall (these meetings happen quarterly). Between assessment meetings, the principal reviews progress of particular students with teachers through daily observation and by referencing the data binder.

j. Describe any changes made to the curriculum since your initial application or last renewal and provide the rationale for these changes.

During course of the contract term no changes have occurred to our instructional approach to teaching. We are still committed to balanced literacy and the workshop model, which we employ in

all content areas. We still use PAX as our core program to address climate and culture, with guidance from Responsive Classrooms belief systems. The shift in our curriculum has followed the requirements of the Common Core Curriculum. In the elementary grades, in language arts, we've continued to create genre-based units of study, aligning this work with the Common Core rather than the older Maryland State Curriculum. We continue to use Words Their Way to support student learning in phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition. Two years ago, after recognizing that we needed a comprehensive writing program in the elementary grades, we adopted the Units of Study in Nonfiction program, by Tony Stead.

Our shifts with mathematics have been more comprehensive. Last year, in addition to focusing on computation goals, discussed earlier in the application, we shifted to the Engage New York curriculum, with some modifications for small group instruction, complexity of learning, and additional work with computation. We felt that the Engage New York Curriculum was closely aligned with the Common Core, but didn't sufficiently challenge students in more conceptual, complex thinking.

In our middle grades, we are in the process of transitioning to Connected Mathematics. Our sister school, Afya Public Charter School, also uses this curriculum. We are looking for continuity of instruction between our schools in this area to enhance teacher collaboration and learning, based on analysis of common assessments. The Connected Mathematics curriculum was adopted at APCS because it challenges students to reason and think abstractly in rigorous, meaningful ways.

We continue to overhaul our science curriculum to meet the challenges of the Next Generation Science Standards. Two summers ago, we consulted with a professor from Towson University in provide our teachers with training about the new standards and ways to increase hands-on opportunities. This work continues today. Additionally, we continue to invest in capital, including a new science lab, and personnel additions that will bolster our science program.

Given the rapidity and breadth of the changes, good communication with families has been challenging—even though, as the SER team notes in various places, we have good communication structures in place. Thus far, we've relied on all of the communication literature provided by MSDE and City Schools to outline the various shifts in curriculum and assessment. We've also held numerous outreach events for families during the evening, where teachers explain the new

curriculum implications and give parents the opportunity to explore, first hand, the new curriculum. (See Appendix III for related evidence.)

The area of growth for us here lies in more sophisticated communication systems. We're working on our new website, which will allow parents easier access to their child's homework and classwork assignments. We're also planning to videotape lessons around key math components and make these available to parents so they can understand how their students are being taught different concepts. This work will take place over the next three school years.

k. How has the school maintained fidelity to its contract and to the school's implementation of key design elements?

The school maintained fidelity to its contract throughout the term. The school's mission, articulated in full in the next section, focuses on creating a learning environment where students can experience intellectual, social/emotional, and physical growth in a safe and rewarding way. We've been committed to rigorous instruction and our performance results show that we've been successful, in all subgroups, in this area. We think culture and climate are paramount to a school's success. The SER team noted that we were Highly Effective in this area. In our charter we said that we wanted to create a school where students had a chance to be physically active on a daily basis while having many opportunities to explore and express themselves through the arts. We've done this. We emphasized in our original charter application that we wanted to provide our students with a rich and rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for middle school, high school, and beyond. We've done this, though we recognize, as the SER report notes, that the staff's diversity needs to be more reflective of the student population, and are taking immediate steps to address this. Finally, we set out to create a school that was attuned to the needs of parents, included open lines of communication, and was overseen responsibly by the Afya Baltimore, Inc. governing board. We've accomplished all of these things in a Highly Effective manner, again as noted by the SER team. There is no doubt that we have areas of growth and things to learn. At the same time, there can also be no doubt that we've maintained fidelity to our charter goals and implemented them at a very high level.

l. What is the school's mission and how has it been realized?

The school's mission is: Tunbridge students will create and learn the habits of mind and body that will lead to their intellectual, physical, social, and emotional health. Continuing, the school's website describes the school's vision as: "students will study rigorously throughout their elementary and then

middle grades years, and ultimately become graduates who are articulate, literate young people proud to engage in the complexities of today’s world. Tunbridge graduates will be ready for the high school of their choice and ready to live healthy, purposeful lives.”

As the SER report notes on pages 13-15, the school actualizes its mission on a daily basis in a Highly Effective way. The school sponsors (sometimes in conjunction with the Parent Teacher Organization) annual events such as the Family Olympics each spring and Coffee Klatch, which brings families together each Friday morning for coffee and conversation, The Afya Mile Run, in which students from Tunbridge participate, and a host of other activities, including instructional nights for families, basketball tournaments, fishing trips, and bike rides along the Oregon Ridge Trail. These programs bring a unifying effect to the school. As the SER team noted, *“the school community shares an understanding of, and commitment to, the school mission, vision, and values, including a clear understanding of strategic goals and initiatives.”* Because of this shared understanding of and commitment to the vision, the school has been able to deliver quality programming to all of its students.

There have been no substantive changes to the school’s mission over the past four years. Clearly there are areas of growth with respect to the implementation of our mission—the mission itself, however, is the right one, and we’ll remain committed to it in the future.

### **3. Does Tunbridge Have a Strong School Climate?**

#### **a. School Culture**

i. Does the school provide a safe, supportive learning environment for students, families, teachers and staff?

As noted and explained in the SER, the school does a Highly Effective job of providing a safe, supportive learning environment for students, families, teachers and staff. The school community shares an understanding of and commitment to the mission of the school, which is discussed above. Students, staff, and families feel physically and emotionally safe at the school, again as noted in the SER (page 13).

ii. Does the school culture reflect and embrace student, staff and community diversity?

The school culture does reflect and embrace student, staff, and community diversity. As noted in the SER (page 15), school leadership, teachers, and staff build *“strong relationships with families and community stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.”* Additionally, *“the school’s curricula, resources, and programs consider cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity,”* according to the SER team (page 16). The school

staff is diverse in terms of teaching experience and includes teachers across the continuum; however, the school is not diverse in terms of race or gender. We've begun to address this with this year's cohort of new teachers. We'll continue to do this as we add additional staffing in our final year of expansion.

iii. Please discuss any school rituals or routines that contribute to the creation of a positive school culture.

The school has many rituals and routines that contribute to the creation of a positive school culture and reinforce the mission. We've discussed several of them above, including Family Olympics and the Coffee Klatch. The SER report notes many of them as well:

*"Teachers reported that elementary students are rewarded through the Good Behavior Game and other class-specific recognitions. School leadership, teachers, members of the student support team, board members, and families reported that students are often recognized through school-wide assemblies and during the Friday Social. At assemblies, students are acknowledged for perfect attendance and academic achievement. The Friday Social was described by stakeholders as a school-wide celebration, in which grade-level accomplishments are announced. Additionally, all stakeholders reported and a review of archived "tootles" confirmed that [as part of the PAX program] both teachers and students receive "tootles" as a means of recognizing actions that exemplify the school's expectations. School leadership, teachers, and families reported that the "tootles" are read to the school community during announcements. Additionally, school leadership and teachers reported that staff members of acknowledged through teacher appreciation luncheons, gifts, Saint Patrick's Day Shamrocks to acknowledge why the school is lucky to have each staff member, and handwritten appreciation cards from the principal." (page 12-13)*

#### **b. Highly Effective Instruction**

i. Please describe the school's approach to instruction and the elements that characterize how the school seeks to implement it.

The school approaches instruction through a workshop model and is aligned with the framework for instruction that City Schools uses. We follow a cycle of learning and implementation with our teachers that begins with goal setting and collaborative planning linked to standards and rigorous assessments, continues with teaching and observation of practice, and flows towards discussion of student progress and performance—either through our CTT meetings or principal/teacher conferences—and adjustment to instruction based on evidence, which include tests, Wireless results, or benchmarking from Fountas and Pinnell assessments. The SER accurately reports on other

elements of our instructional approach and, we feel, notes key areas for us to improve upon. We'll address these when we discuss the future work of the school.

ii. Please describe the school's approach to instruction for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Our approach to instruction for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment first emphasizes interventions and small-group work within the general education classroom and pull out time for one-on-one or small groups of students for extended learning or to reduce distractions. We also provide self-contained settings for 11 students.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for students with disabilities is understanding the purpose of the work. In many cases, they don't have what author and educator Patricia Cunningham refers to as cognitive clarity prior to starting to work and so they are more often confused, which leads to frustration.

In 92 percent of classes observed by the SER team, all tasks had a clear and intentional purpose. Other key elements to our instructional program for students with disabilities emphasize differentiation and scaffolding of instruction, additional time for intervention and practice, and most importantly tracking of progress on a regular basis. We emphasize these things for all students at the school. For special education students we do them more intensely and in smaller increments of time.

iii. Please describe the school's teacher and school leader recruitment plan, including key qualifications, milestones, and the stakeholders involved.

The ABI governing board, which includes parents and community members, recruits and selects the principal of the school. The process the ABI board uses complies with the guidelines given by City Schools. Detailed evidence of the process is included in the Appendix IV. Key elements of this process include the following: board meetings with teachers, students, and families to hear what stakeholders want and expect in a school leader; a public posting of the position; an interview process that includes multiple candidates; an interview panel that includes board members and a member from the Tunbridge staff.

The principal of the school oversees the recruitment of teachers, focusing on selecting candidates who understand the mission of the school and share our vision for instructional practice. Candidates visit the school and interview with multiple groups of people, including the leadership team and teachers. We are considering ways to include additional stakeholders in this process, including

families. Ultimately we're looking for good teachers who are committed to the school for the long term. This year we retained 100 percent of our classroom teachers.

iv. Please describe the school's professional development plan, including time and resources devoted to it, the process for the creation of the professional development schedule, and how the school gauges the effectiveness of the professional development provided.

Our plan for professional development, as the SER team notes, engages teachers based on identified needs and in alignment with the school's instructional vision. Furthermore, again noted by the SER team, *"School leadership and teachers reported school-wide professional development begins in July before the start of the school year with planning by the instructional leadership team (ILT). According to school leadership and teachers; the areas of focus for professional development are identified based on end-of-year, grade-level meetings. As a result of these grade level meetings, school leadership and teachers reported that the areas of focus for the current year are fact fluency (for the first half of the year) and writing (for the second half for the year). Continuing, school leadership and teachers reported and a review of the school's pre-service plans confirmed that the areas for professional development for the current school year include: climate and culture, school-wide protocols, math standards, instructional models for math, and a review of writing standards through the newly implemented writing curriculum. Further, school leadership and teachers reported and a review of professional readings confirmed that school-based professional development also focused on professional learning cycles. During the second half of the school year, professional development topics included: grade level standards, assessing the needs of the writing programs, and teacher created timelines."* (page 12)

We gauge the effectiveness of professional development in four ways. First, we look at the climate surveys, which include questions related to the quality of professional development. Second, we look at data from the VAL-Ed survey, which indicates how teachers feel about the training they are receiving and/or leading. Third, we evaluate surveys given at the school level, after specific events. See Appendix V for record of this. Finally, we look at the results of student performance. We've discussed this earlier in the application with respect to overhauling our mathematics curriculum. We identified a problem, worked with a consultant, and the assessed student performance to see if there was a connection between the teacher training and the student outcomes, which in this case there was.

### **c. Families and Community Engagement**

Please describe how parents are involved in their child's education and in the development of the school culture.

Tunbridge engages with parents in a Highly Effective manner, as noted in the SER:

*“The school uses multiple strategies and vehicles to communicate information about school progress, policies, events, and the academic and social development of students to families and the community. School leadership, members of the student support team, and parents reported that in addition to the school’s open door policy; families and community members are informed of school progress through face-to-face discussions at arrival and dismissal; and the weekly Coffee Klatch. Stakeholders (families, students, and school leadership) described the Coffee Klatch as an informal, weekly meeting held in the school’s cafeteria with families, community partners and school leadership. Continuing, school leadership, teachers, and families reported and a review of class-specific monthly newsletters and weekly principal newsletters confirmed that written communication is another means by which stakeholders are informed of school events. Finally, school leadership, teachers, members of the student support team, families, and students reported and a review of school calendars with highlighted dates confirmed that teachers call, text, email, and host family-teacher conferences to discuss students’ academic and behavioral performance.*

*The school establishes regular structures for two-way communication, which facilitate opportunities for families and the community to participate in, or provide feedback on school-wide decisions. School leadership and parents reported that the parent teacher organization (PTO) hosts several events throughout the school year and meets monthly (with an open forum to voice concern) and members of the school leadership team are always in attendance. Further, families reported that at the end of the formal meetings there are break-out sessions based on family interest and discussions are focused on solutions to problems presented. Continuing, families reported that meeting minutes are shared to ensure that all families are aware of what was discussed during each break-out group session.*

*Additionally, families reported that PTO meeting times alternate to allow all families to attend. Some of the meeting times can include but are not limited to; mornings, evenings, Saturday mornings, and after-school events. Beyond formal PTO meetings, families and school leadership reported that families and school leadership also meet informally every Friday for the Coffee Klatch. During the Coffee Klatch, families and school leadership reported that there have been invited guest speakers and discussions on recruitment strategies to engage prospective parents in school-wide volunteer opportunities. Finally, families and school leadership reported that families complete a school created survey at the end of each year, which asks questions about the school’s culture and climate.*

*The school addresses families’ and community partners’ questions and concerns, and uses feedback to improve the school. School leadership and families reported that feedback is provided through the weekly Coffee Klatch and parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings. According to school leadership, teachers, and families; examples of feedback provided and school improvements made included the return of the Spanish class for third through sixth graders, a new refrigerator and salad bar for students, the expansion of the middle school; and the new school library*

*and media center. Additionally, teachers reported and a review of the school's Friday Letters confirmed that the school's dismissal policy was modified in response to families' concerns about students climbing trees and the jungle gym with limited adult supervision. Families reported that they always feel as if their needs are heard as they principal has an open door policy and is willing to discuss their concerns.*

*Continuing, according to school leadership, examples of feedback provided from community partners about school improvement occurs at the beginning of each semester with professors from Towson University and Loyola University Maryland about programming and possible changes. School leadership further reported that feedback for the Baltimore Talent Education Center (BTEC) (the organization that provides the after school programming) takes place at the beginning and end of each year to discuss staffing and the school's needs." (page 14-15)*

The handbook is updated annually and is distributed to families via email, our website, and during beginning of the year conferences.

Please see Appendix VI for a sampling of agendas and meeting minutes for ABI board meetings during the time of the contract. Agendas and meeting minutes for all ABI board meetings are available upon request.

#### **d. Parent, Teacher, and Student Satisfaction**

Please describe the extent to which students and parents are satisfied with the school.

Parents and students are satisfied with the school. According to the data tables, over the term of the contract 89.3 percent of parents and 81.5 percent of students were satisfied with the school, giving the school ranking in the 89th percentile for both parents and students and a Highly Effective rating on the scoring rubric. On the Chicago Five Essentials Report, which assessed Tunbridge as well organized for school improvement, the results for the students were neutral, with very strong or strong results in several categories, including that teachers expect students to do their best academically. At the same time, there were some weak results, including student-teacher trust. Our position on this is that there are things to learn from this survey as we continue to build our middle school programming. The student trust aspect of school culture, for example, is enormously important to a school's success and teachers' ability to engage with students and form lasting bonds. As we continue to develop our advisory program in our middle grades, we will use both the curriculum and the professional learning for staff to strengthen teacher-student connections.

Obviously, our goal is to have strong or very strong responses from our students in each of the categories, as we do in the other three categories in this survey. At the same time, this particular survey was given only to sixth grade students, of which we had 44, so the survey is a small sample and doesn't tell us anything about how the general student body feels. The data in related categories on the school system's survey (included at the end of this narrative), given to students in grades three through six, is significantly stronger.

Classroom Teacher Retention Data:

Year	Number of Classroom Teachers	Number Retained	% Rate
2010-11	10	8	80
2011-12	12	10	83
2012-13	14	12	85
2013-14	17	17	100

To gauge teacher satisfaction we use the climate survey, the Chicago 5E, results from the VAL-Ed survey, and surveys from professional development (see included in Appendix V). Teachers are increasingly satisfied with the school, according to the climate survey. The five-year average percentage of teachers satisfied with the school is 91 percent, which ranks the school in the 91st percentile. There has been a steady rise in satisfaction over the term, starting at 88 percent in the first year rising to 95 percent.

Evidence from other sources correlates with the climate survey. On the Chicago 5E, teachers felt very strongly supported by the principal and had very strong trust in the principal. The teachers also reported, very strongly, that there was a collaborative atmosphere at the school leading to a collective commitment to high student achievement.

The results from the VAL-Ed, which are used as part of the principal evaluation process, also indicated broad teacher support for the principal and satisfaction with the environment in the school

in support of teacher practice.

School leadership interacts with teachers to provide feedback on instruction in several ways. Formally, as noted by the SER team, the principal effectively adheres to the school system's evaluation system to develop faculty capacity (page 11). Feedback is also provided to teachers during professional development before the school year, via grade level team meetings, and through the CTT meetings.

Teachers collaborate with school leaders to further the mission of Tunbridge in formal and informal ways. They participate in workgroups to organize for mission-related activities such as the Friday Socials or Family Olympics. Teachers lead enrichment activities such as a running club, triathlon competitions, a cheerleading club, the First Lego League Robotics team and a team in the National Academic League. In notable and challenging work that took place this summer, teachers and school leaders collaborated to design and organize the expansion of the middle school into our new facility.

#### **e. Student Choice/Enrollment**

Does student choice and/or enrollment data indicate that the school is in high demand?

Based on the number of charter applications for available slots, we can tell that Tunbridge is in high demand. For this past school year, the school had 555 applications for 84 slots. A summary of our lottery information is included in Appendix VII. During each year of the contract term, we have been at full enrollment.

#### **f. Student Cohort Retention**

If the student cohort retention rate is a concern, detail the school's strategy for addressing this and the school's goals in this area.

We are Highly Effective in the area of student retention, according to the data provided by City Schools, with an average retention rating of 71.4. There isn't a large sampling here, with just two year's worth of data focused on our pre-k, so it's hard to make too many conclusions. We do think, however, that our cohort retention using pre-k as the data set, and the retention rate for our overall student body, will continue to rise, as our enrollment has stabilized significantly since our first year. We've found through analysis of SMS data, for example, that from July 1, 2013 to August 21, 2014 we've retained 90 percent of our students. Additionally, all students in pre-k last year matriculated to kindergarten this year. In the future, as we've stated, our goal is for 90 percent of fifth graders to

select the Tunbridge middle school as their school of choice.

### **g. Attendance**

Please discuss the specific strategies used during the contract term to maintain high and/or improve attendance rates.

The school takes a comprehensive approach to attendance, starting with the belief that both the schoolwide and classroom climate need to be safe and conducive to learning. Additionally, the school focuses on implementing its mission, which brings unity to the school community. And, finally, the school has developed open communication with families, which further builds a sense of trust and commitment. All of these things are discussed in detail in the SER report.

Operationally, the school has structures in place to ensure good attendance, including phone calls home to families when students are out, written letters to families to document attendance concerns, and in-person meetings with families to offer support.

The school's rate of attendance during the contract term, according to the data tables, was 96.5 percent. The school district's average over the same time was 93.2. Over the course of the contract the school's attendance rate for students with disabilities was 95 percent, compared to 91.6 for the district in this subgroup.

### **h. Chronic Absence**

Please discuss the strategies used during the contract term to maintain a low chronic absence rate or reduce the chronic absence rate of the school as a whole as well as within specific population of students where chronic absence is a concern.

The school addresses chronic absences through intense work with individual families. Often school leaders connect families with needed services, like the CHIP program; occasionally the work is more assertive and includes written notification and document and even referrals. The chronic absenteeism rate for Tunbridge students has dropped over the course of the contract and was just three percent for all students and seven percent for students with disabilities in 2014, compared to 17.4 percent (all students) and 23 percent (students with disabilities) for the district. The 20 percent rate for sixth grade last year is skewed due to sample size. We have only five students with disabilities in grade six and one was chronically absent due to health issues. We did connect this family with the CHIP program.

## **i. Suspensions and Expulsions**

What is the school's data on student suspension and expulsions and what goals has the school set for a future term?

During the contract term, the school averaged 8.6 suspensions per year and had one expulsion. The school averaged 4.2 suspensions per year for students with disabilities. In 2014 suspensions for students with disabilities peaked at nine, all of which were linked to three students. The peak number of overall suspension occurred in 2013, with 22. Two students in particular were suspended multiple times. Gradually, different supports were put in place for these students and they were suspended less often. The number of overall suspensions dropped from 22 to 12 in 2014, even as enrollment rose.

Our suspension rate in both special education and for all students was low throughout the term because of our commitment to creating a positive culture and climate in classrooms and around the school—areas for which we received a Highly Effective rating by the SER team. We have good structures in place to address students' social and emotional needs. As the SER report states on page 14:

*"Members of the student support team reported that the school strives to intervene to support students before negative behaviors are exhibited. School leadership reported and a review of daily behavior logs and the student support good behavior book confirmed that families and students are active participants in the reinforcement of students' positive behavior. Further, school leadership and members of the student support team reported that students can receive passes to the school's reflection room if a break is needed. While in the reflection room, members of the student support team and teachers reported students select and complete de-escalation activities. Members of the student support team and teachers also reported that the support team works with teachers on classroom management strategies and the creation of behavior charts. Teachers also reported that students receive quarterly socio-emotional report cards with the focus on taking care of others and the communal space."*

4. Has the School Followed Sufficient Financial Management and Governance Practices?

### **a. Has the school been operated in a fiscally sound manner?**

i. Please describe the school's history regarding its internal controls and the sound use of financial resources and its record in acting as a custodian of public funds.

We have an exemplary history regarding internal controls and the sound use of financial resources and acting as a custodian of public funds. Documents outlining our financial control systems are included in Document Request 6.f. During its eight year history as a non-profit, ABI has had clean

audits with no findings or concerns. Throughout its history, ABI has completed lending agreements with TRF, from Philadelphia. For our first three loans, we needed the backing of a local funder to secure the loan, as our organization was new with few assets. This past year, ABI independently secured a 1.7 million dollar loan due to the strength of its financial oversight, organizational capacity, and history of performance.

Fundraising at Tunbridge PCS has been done at a small scale, netting between five and ten thousand dollars annually. ABI has pursued and won grants from a number of local foundations to support its mission. During the contract term there have been no financial issues or concerns.

The board of ABI would like to address a recent letter of concern—the only one it has received on any issue in its history— related to turning in its last audit. The only reason ABI had any problems with the audit submission is because the school system overhauled its own auditing timeline, pushing back the date when charter operators received end-of-year documentation from the district to late October. Prior to this past year our organization has never had a late submission. The audit submission date in the current contract should be renegotiated if the district is going to continue to release documents to operators so late in the auditing cycle. We feel that in this particular case, given the extenuating circumstances, a letter of concern for late submission should have no bearing on the assessment of our financial capacity, which has been undertaken in a highly effective manner in every way.

ii. If an audited financial statement for the most recent year is not yet available at the time of this application, the school must submit a preliminary summary of functional expenses for that year.

NA

### **b. Strategic Leadership**

i. Please describe the school leader’s vision for an effective learning environment and the steps the school leader takes to cultivate this environment in the school.

The school leader’s vision for an effective learning environment centers on working with teachers to create classrooms that are safe, engaging places for kids to be—places where challenging and creative instruction is accessible to all students, places where students achieve at a high level. As noted in the SER on page 9, the school has been Highly Effective in achieving this environment. To cultivate this environment the principal engages with teachers, parents and students during professional development time, classroom visits, and conferencing to build the relationships and

trust essential to the work. The principal then works with the executive director and the governing board to reflect on practice and monitor progress.

ii. Please describe how your staffing enables the school to provide supervisory support to all staff, and provide evidence that the leadership structure as constituted serves both the instructional and operational needs of the school.

The principal provides the supervisory support to the staff. A founder of Afya Baltimore, Inc. and former Director of Teaching and Learning at Afya PCS works at the school three days each week to assist with instructional support, particularly with the middle school program. Next year, when fully enrolled, the school will add an additional instructional leader. The school also has a school leader who focuses on student culture and climate issues and helps with operational needs of the school. The executive director of the school has extensive experience with instruction, operations and finances and supports the principal in all three of these areas daily.

iii. Please describe the evaluation process for the school leader, including the individuals involved, the schedule, criteria for evaluation and any follow up.

The executive director of ABI works with staff from the district to evaluate the school leader. We adhere to the evaluation system used by City Schools, and follow the schedule, criteria for evaluation, and follow up that are outlined in the collective bargaining agreement.

### **c. Governance**

i. Please describe how the school's board monitors the academic performance, financial considerations, operational soundness and overall compliance record of the school.

As the SER report notes, the school is governed in a Highly Effective manner. The board monitors academic performance, financial considerations, operational soundness, and overall compliance through its committee work and its general meetings. The metrics the board uses to assess progress include achievement data such as the MSA and results from Wireless, monthly financial reporting, and reports from school leaders and the executive director at committee and general meetings.

ii. Please indicate how often the board meets, describe its committee structure and indicate how often committees meet.

The full board meets quarterly. The executive committee meets monthly. The following committees support the work of the full board: governance, teaching and learning, community engagement, and finance. The committees meet a minimum of once per quarter and often more regularly. Two years ago, for example, the board was expanding its recruitment efforts so the governance committee met multiple times per month. The budget committee meets monthly during the budget season.

iii. Please describe the process to recruit and nominate new board members.

The process to recruit, nominate, and train new board members is outlined in documents in Appendix IX.

iv. If the school has encountered any academic, fiscal, operations or compliance challenges requiring board intervention over the course of the contract term, please describe the challenge and what steps the board has taken to address the concern(s).

The school has had no compliance challenges requiring board intervention during the course of the contract.

v. If the school partners with an educational service provider for the management and/or operation of the school, please describe how the board evaluates the performance of the provider and indicate how the school holds the operator accountable.

The school does not partner with a service provider.

#### **d. Laws, Rules, Regulations and Policies**

i. Please describe the school's history with regard to compliance with applicable laws, rules, regulations and policies.

The school has had no compliance issues with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies.

ii. Address the school's practices and systems with regard to compliance matters, including measures to track requirements, individuals involved and practices for addressing any significant problems.

With regard to compliance, the principal is responsible for ensuring that the school complies with school system policies and relevant procedures. The executive director meets regularly with the principal on related issues. Should significant concerns arise, the principal would report information to the executive director who would then consult with the board.

iii. Please describe any significant compliance problems that occurred during the current contract term, measures taken to address those problems, to prevent them in the future and the current status of each such situation.

There have been no compliance problems during the current contract term.

iv. Please discuss the school's efforts during the current contract term to address the regulatory requirements relating to special student populations, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

The school, under the supervision of the principal, who works in conjunction with the IEP coordinator, addresses all regulatory requirements related to special student populations. We've had no compliance issues in this area during the term of the contract.

v. Please describe the policies and procedures in place at the school to ensure appropriate service provision for students with disabilities (e.g., evaluations, I.E.P. meetings, compliance with mandated timeframes, etc.)

The school, under the supervision of the principal, adheres to the policies and procedures recommended by the school system in order to ensure appropriate services to students with disabilities. The IEP coordinator leads this work and the principal supervises and monitors the implementation. There have been no compliance issues in this area during the term of the contract.

**5. If renewed, what are the school's plans for the next contract term?**

**a. What is the school's vision for the next five years?**

There are five things the school and the ABI governing board want to focus on over the next five years. They are:

1. Continue to work on our pursuit of outstanding teaching and learning and preparation for the Common Core. We have a good foundation on which to build. As the SER team noted, there are two key areas we can improve upon with respect to our instructional program. The first of these is committing to setting growth goals that guide strategic planning. The second is systematically analyzing student performance data and adjusting practice accordingly. We have some structures in place now and many of our teachers are doing this work effectively. Our next step in these areas is for this work to become a more fully ingrained part of our school culture, something all teachers do in a Highly Effective manner. The challenge in this kind of work is really one of mind-set— shifting from current practice to better practice in an organized way. There are no concerning risks involved here.

2. Further enrich and enhance our overall program generally and our middle school program in particular.

- We would like to more fully infuse technology into our teaching and learning. We'd like to invest in Smart Boards for our classrooms, infuse more web-based instruction into our lessons, particularly during small-group time, and increase our technology infrastructure so parents can better communicate with teachers to track student performance.
- We plan to fully invest in our library, which is in its infancy at this point, so that we have a hub in the school building where students, families, and teachers can go to both find new books and find out new information. We see the full development of the library as a five-year project, buttressed by the on-going financial support of ABI and the Tunbridge PTO.

- We want to ensure that we have good systems in place to identify our more advanced learners and enrich the educational experience they have at Tunbridge in intentional, strategic ways. This includes giving them exposure and access to complex text, making sure that our science and mathematics programs are rigorous and challenging, and making sure our middle school is strong enough to provide a pathway to the best high schools— public and private— in Baltimore City.
- In regards to our middle school, our goal is quite clear: We want to increase the percentage of our fifth graders that choose the Tunbridge middle school as their school of choice from 82 percent to 90 percent. To achieve this, we have to improve all aspects of our academic and enrichment program as described above.

The key challenge here is that we are a small school. The SER team noted that we don't have a person designated to enrichment or accelerated learning, and we simply don't have the resources for that. We would like to create a program for these students without a robust budget. We plan to engage our PTO for assistance and pursue partnerships with universities and other groups to give our accelerated students the opportunities they deserve. We'll have to think creatively about our staffing model to do more with less. Again, there are no concerning risks to this work.

3. Commit to more comprehensive approaches to leadership development and teacher recruitment. We have some solid structures in place in this area, but we need to do more, including intensifying our recruitment efforts to attract a broader, more diverse pool of candidates, and creating opportunities for other stakeholders to participate in these efforts. The right focus on this commitment will bring success without any concerning challenges or risks.

4. Develop the ABI board to focus more on strategic planning and financial capacity. Our board has been strong since ABI began in 2007 and is heavily invested in the well-being of both Tunbridge PCS and Afya PCS. Its work has been primarily operational, although very often related to complex work around building projects. The next step is to continue to work with school leaders to identify ways to enhance our program and our mission, and organize to seek more grant funding and raise more money. We don't perceive any concerning challenges or risks to this work.

5. Consider replication. This is an area the ABI board and executive director have been discussing for some time now. We believe we have the capacity to replicate the work we have done at

Tunbridge. We're particularly interested in forming a partnership with a traditional school to do this work, and our board plans to pursue this consideration over the next year.

We are well aware of the challenges and risks in replication. The addition of schools under their umbrella can give an operator an opportunity to grow and become stronger. It can also stretch staff and move the organization away from its strengths and its mission. At this point the ABI board is considering all of these factors in its decision making related to replication. Should the board further pursue the matter it will create a sub-committee, led by its executive director, to fully explore, do a risk-benefit analysis, and make recommendations to the board at large to consider.

**b. Please discuss any anticipated changes to key elements to the school's program.**

The board is not contemplating any changes to key elements to the school's program beyond what's discussed below.

i. Please complete the table on page 20 entitled, Proposed Enrollment and Grade Expansion Plan Template.

We plan to make a slight change to our enrollment structure, increasing our class sizes from 22 students per class to 23 across the grades. We also project having 13 students in self-contained classrooms. The result is that our cap would increase from 436 to 450. The demand that we have for enrollment at Tunbridge is more than sufficient to justify the enrollment adjustment. (Please see table at the end of this narrative.)

ii. Any anticipated changes to the school's calendar.

We don't anticipate any changes to our school's calendar.

iii. The process and timeline for making changes to the curriculum in line with the requirements of the Common Core State Standards.

Earlier in the application we discussed how we're making changes to prepare for the Common Core (section 2 j, pages 8-9). We've been shifting in this direction for the past two years and will continue this transition for at least the first three years of the next contract term.

iv. Any anticipated changes to core design elements of the school (such as the curriculum, leadership, or staffing structure).

We don't anticipate any changes to the core design elements of the school during the next term. We are interested in changing our relationship with the district in terms of special education. (This would be for Afya PCS, too.) We understand that there is work occurring now between the district

and another charter school operator specifically, and the Coalition of Baltimore City Charter Schools more generally. Rather than putting in our own proposal at this time, we'd like the opportunity to pursue this with the district in a collaborative way. Later this fall, we'll write a formal letter to the district pursuing the matter.

v. Any anticipated changes to the management/operation of the school, either by the removal or addition of an educational service provider, or a change from one such provider to another.

We are not anticipating any changes to the management/operation of the school.

vi. Any anticipated changes to the school program that would require a waiver.

We are not anticipating needing to seek a waiver.