



Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner

State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminister Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

DATE: January 6, 2025
TO: Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
FROM: Angélica Infante-Green, Commissioner *Angélica Infante Green*
RE: **Blackstone Academy Renewal Recommendation**

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to renew the charter of Blackstone for 3 years beginning with school year 2025-26 and expiring at the end of school year 2027-28.

Enclosed Documents:

The following documents provide further detail regarding the Commissioner's recommendation and analysis contributing to that recommendation:

- Commissioner's Recommendation Overview: including an overview of the charter
- RIDE's Renewal Report: containing detailed information regarding the performance of the charter and findings as a result of the renewal site visit
- Charter's Response: including additional information and context provided independently by the charter in regard to the renewal recommendation and report
- Annual Performance Dashboards: containing detail on performance ratings for each school and each year of the charter's term



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School Overview: Blackston Academy

Current Charter Overview			
Charter Type	Independent	2024–25 Grades Served	9-12
School Year Opened	2002	2024–25 Enrollment	356
Current Charter Term	2022/23-2024/25	Authorized Enrollment	350
Enrolling Communities	Pawtucket, Central Falls, Providence	Location(s)	Pawtucket

School Mission and Model	
School Mission:	The mission of Blackstone Academy states: The mission of Blackstone Academy Charter School is to build a strong community of learners and leaders. Our small educational environment helps foster independent inquiry, teamwork, and communication. Our students develop the skills to solve problems and use their voices in ways that lead to success in the academic, social, and professional arenas. Students demonstrate their achievements through a process of discovery, presentation, and reflection. Community involvement and community improvement are key themes at BACS. In addition to classes, our portfolio system structures the progression of their learning by having students study themselves and their relationships to others, move forward with an exploration of the local community, and ultimately integrate an understanding of the wider world as students become responsible, motivated, life-long learners.
School Model:	BACS emphasizes their integration of The Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools into its educational philosophy. These include: • Learning to use one's mind well • Less is more, depth over coverage • Goals apply to all students • Personalization • Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach • Demonstration of mastery • A tone of decency and trust • Commitment to the entire school • Resources dedicated to teaching and learning • Using principles of democracy and equity in all decision making at the school.

Recommendation Key Points:	(1A) School Performance: • In SY20-21, the school did not receive a rating due to the COVID pandemic which resulted in no statewide accountability for those years.
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- The school did not meet expectations in SY21-22 due to a 1-star school rating on statewide accountability.
- The school approached expectations in SY22-23 and SY23-24 due to a 2-star school rating on statewide accountability.
- The schools ACCESS test scores have grown year-over-year and have outperformed the state within its charter term.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
BACS Average Scale Score on ACCESS	360	363	370
State of RI Average Scale Score on ACCESS	312	314	316

- 2022-23 the school earned 3 stars in the Diploma Plus Measure and produces 4-year graduation rates that outperforms the state. The school is also a leader in college attainment and persistence.

(1B) School Comparison:

- In SY20-21, the school did not receive a rating due to the COVID pandemic which resulted in no statewide accountability for those years.
- The school did not meet expectations in SY21-22 due to the school earning 1 ELP Progress point as measured by school index score published in the statewide school accountability system. Moreover, the school earned 1 point each for growth in both ELA and Math as published in the statewide school accountability system.
- The school approached expectations in SY22-23 due to the school earning 1 ELP Progress point as measured by school index score published in the statewide school accountability system.
- In SY23-24 the school met expectations in school comparison:

BACS	Charter School Proficiency Rate	Charter Proficiency Error Value	Charter Proficiency Range Low End	Charter Proficiency Range High End	Enrolling district average
ELA	34.90	5.03	29.87	39.93	19.5
Math	9.60	3.11	6.49	12.71	2.2

(1) Financial:

- The school met expectations in all years of its charter terms

(2) Organizational



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	• In the school-prepared Annual Report. The school highlighted that they use the following for family engagement: - o SurveyWorks - o BACS Family Organization and their events; documented communications between the Family Organization Coordinator, the Parent Leadership Team and families (the Coordinator and the PLT contacted every Blackstone family at least once over the course of the academic year, either via phone call, text, or email) - o Zoom events asking for family feedback regarding school policies; family surveys sent out on an as-needed basis. • This school is part of the EnrollRI Common Application and received 740+ applications for 145 seats in 2024. • The charter provided assurances of holding school leader(s) accountable in the school-prepared Annual Report. The school reported that members of the Executive Committee conducted informal evaluations with the Executive Director and the Principal/Head of School as the intensive 360 evaluation occurs every three years. (3) Compliance • Over the course of the term, the charter met for each of the criteria associated with student rights, according to the various RIDE offices responsible for monitoring civil rights, special education, and English learners. The charter has submitted the charter school applicant report each year. The charter has adopted the EnrollRI Charter School Common Application. • The school met expectations in this sustainability measure during their charter term.
Proposed Conditions:	• Blackstone Academy must submit a comprehensive plan, including interim metrics and goals, to address Math achievement for all grades for RIDE approval by June 30, 2025. By June 30, 2026, the school must submit evidence of plan implementation, including documentation of interim results.



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Overview of Academic Performance:

Test Name: SAT - ELA

	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Meeting (L3) or Exceeding Expectations (L4)	23.7	31.7%	34.9%
Approaching Expectations (L2)	27.6%	31.7%	21.7%
Does Not Meet Expectations (L1)	48.7%	36.6%	43.4%
Average Growth Percentile	44	52	51

Test Name: SAT - Math

	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Meeting (L3) or Exceeding Expectations (L4)	7.9	12%	9.6%
Approaching Expectations (L2)	38.2%	36.1%	43.4%
Does Not Meet Expectations (L1)	53.9%	51.8%	47%
Average Growth Percentile	41	46	52

Average Growth Percentile Key:

Low Growth	1-34
Typical Growth	35-69
High Growth	70-99

Overview of Charter Performance Ratings:



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School Name:

	Indicators	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Academic	(1A) School Performance	NR	DNM	A	A
	(1B) School Comparison	NR	A	A	M
Sustainability	(1) Financial	M	M	M	M
	(2) Organizational	E	E	E	E
	(3) Compliance	M	M	M	M

Ratings Key			
E	Exceeds Expectations	DNM	Does Not Meet Expectations
M	Meets Expectations	NR	Not Rated
A	Approaches Expectations	NA	Not Applicable

To: the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Kyleen Carpenter, Head of School; Carolyn Sheehan, Executive Director of Blackstone Academy Charter School

We are pleased to be appearing before the Council for the 6th time in our school's 23 year history, requesting a renewal of the charter for Blackstone Academy Charter School. Although the Department is putting forth a recommendation of a 3-year renewal, we are providing strong evidence to support our request that the Council grant us a 5-year renewal of our charter. Our last renewal came mid-pandemic without enough testing years to judge academic performance. The goal given by RIDE was for Blackstone to obtain at least three stars in the accountability system once test scores were again available. At that time and in the years since, Blackstone has met or exceeded all non-testing related standards set forth in the charter performance handbook.

Areas of Progress & Success during the current charter term:

1. Academic progress as measured by SAT:

Our SAT scores are not only consistently better than high schools in Rhode Island with similar demographics, they are also back to the levels they were pre-pandemic when we were able to earn 3 Stars in the accountability system. This is particularly impressive because over the past three years, the P/SAT test has changed its format and content, our special needs population has doubled and our MLL population has tripled.

When the accountability indicators were announced state-wide for the 22-23 school year, the Commissioner noted in her review, less than 40% of high schools were able to score higher than 2 stars. This number rose to 46% in 23-24. So while Blackstone Academy was not able to meet the three star standard, the majority of high schools in the state found themselves in a similar situation. In contrast, the vast majority of elementary schools were able to meet the 3 star standard. This benchmark seems to be inequitable for high school charters.

Our first year of testing post-pandemic was not only hampered by low SAT scores, but for the first and only time, our participation in State testing did not meet the 95% benchmark, further lowering our median score. This was rectified in the two years that followed.

Year	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	
Rating	Approaches	Meets	Meets (non-academic)	No Rating Covid	DNM	Approaches	Approaches	
SAT scores	464	430	No testing		432	448	434	
ELA/ Math	383	420			420	424	423	

2. Graduation Rate:

For our entire school history, Blackstone's graduation rate has significantly outperformed not only similar high schools, but the State of RI average. This is a consistent area of strength.

3. ELP Performance:

A focus area for Blackstone Academy in the 2022-23 Accountability System was our ELP achievement. Please note that, for 2023-24 Accountability, not only did we improve from 1 to 2 points on this measure, but our Average Scale Scores on ACCESS routinely and dramatically outperform the State of RI over the last several years.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
BACS Average Scale Score on ACCESS	360	363	370
State of RI Average Scale Score on ACCESS	312	314	316

4. Postsecondary Success:

Data from the National Clearinghouse (an externally validated source of post secondary success) consistently shows that Blackstone Academy students outpace statewide average for students entering and sustaining enrollment in higher education. Our own tracking indicates that our student's grades measuring academic skills combined with their consistent work habits are the best predictors of their higher education success. More than 20 alumni are currently enrolled in colleges and universities which accept 15% or less of their applicants(including Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, U Penn. and Yale). Most of those students are receiving full scholarships. Although in the 2023-24 Accountability index, our Postsecondary Success emerged as a focus area, this was not due to fewer students earning a credential, but to RIDE's sudden and unannounced change to the "n" in the calculation formula, using a cohort size instead of graduated student size.

5. External recognition and grant funding:

Since 2018, we have received nearly 1 million dollars of support through the Barr Foundation and been given as well as access to regional and national expertise on secondary education. This includes annual evaluative reviews with Springpoint, focusing on academic rigor and relevance as well as collaborations with secondary schools throughout the country.

6. Current academically-focused Action Steps:

To improve our academic performance over the past years have aligned to our Strategic Plan goals and have focused on: (1) utilizing NWEA MAP testing data to identify student areas of strength and need, (2) augmenting our high quality math curriculum (Into Math) with tutors, a math Instructional coach, opportunities for students to advance in math, and a grant-funded program to support additional focused instruction in math, and (3) adding 2 AP courses, and doubling the number of opportunities for students to earn dual enrollment credits during the school day.



Blackstone Academy Charter School

Renewal Report | 2024

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since 2016-17, RIDE has utilized a [Charter School Performance Review System](#), which was created in collaboration with a committee of charter school practitioners and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. This system was created to increase transparency of charter performance review, provide clarity on charter's performance annually, and ensure consistency of decisions that prioritize the school's academic performance.

Blackstone Academy Charter School (BACS) received a 3-year renewal with the chance to earn 2 more years in SY 2021-2022. *For the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, this school did not receive an academic rating due to COVID-19's impact on statewide testing. Despite this challenge, we were able to generate financial and organizational data for each year.* Performance ratings utilized data from school-generated annual reports and other RIDE monitoring results.

A combination of virtual and on-site interviews with Blackstone Academy took place Spring 2024. Prior to interviews and site visits, the RIDE team reviewed the charter's performance reports to date, the charter's renewal application, and programmatic and organizational documentation submitted by the school. The RIDE team conducted interviews with the charter school board, members of the school's leadership team, teachers, parents, and students. The interviews and site visits are an integral part of the team's ability to corroborate information provided by the charter school, follow up on areas of the school's operations that are not meeting performance expectations and ensure the team has gathered information to help determine performance ratings for the Organizational and Compliance Indicators.

The interviews and site visits were conducted by a cross-office team, led by the Office of School Opportunities, and supported by members of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Blackstone Academy Charter School

Renewal Report | 2024

CHARTER OVERVIEW

Blackstone Academy Charter School is an independent charter, serving students in Central Fall, Pawtucket, and Providence. The charter opened in 2002 and can enroll up to 350 students. The school is located in Pawtucket and serves students in grades 9-12.

BACS emphasizes their integration of The Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools into its educational philosophy. These include:

- Learning to use one's mind well
- Less is more, depth over coverage
- Goals apply to all students
- Personalization
- Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach
- Demonstration of mastery
- A tone of decency and trust
- Commitment to the entire school
- Resources dedicated to teaching and learning
- Using principles of democracy and equity in all decision making at the school.

The mission of Blackstone Academy states: The mission of Blackstone Academy Charter School is to build a strong community of learners and leaders. Our small educational environment helps foster independent inquiry, teamwork, and communication. Our students develop the skills to solve problems and use their voices in ways that lead to success in the academic, social, and professional arenas. Students demonstrate their achievements through a process of discovery, presentation, and reflection.

Community involvement and community improvement are key themes at BACS. In addition to classes, our portfolio system structures the progression of their learning by having students study themselves and their relationships to others, move forward with an exploration of the local community, and ultimately integrate an understanding of the wider world as students become responsible, motivated, life-long learners.

Enrollment Demographic Information

Descriptive demographics are based on Average Daily Membership reported to RIDE by the charter school and reported publicly by RIDE.

* Indicates that data is suppressed to small sample size

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total Enrollment	347	345	356
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility	73%	72%	82%
Students with Individualized Education Programs	11%	13%	17%
Students Receiving MLL Services	13%	19%	22%
Multiracial	4%	4%	7%
Black/African American	25%	25%	20%
Latino/Hispanic	64%	62%	63%
American American/Alaskan Native	*	*	*
Asian	1%	1%	1%
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	1%	1%	*
White	5%	6%	7

Blackstone Academy Charter School

Renewal Report | 2024

PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

In 2020-21 school performance measures were not included in reports.

Each indicator's specific criteria ratings inform an overall indicator rating. Each charter receives a detailed annual performance report that identifies ratings for each individual criteria and overall indicators. These performance reports accompany the renewal report.

Indicators		SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Academic	(1A) School Performance	NR	DNM	A	A
	(1B) School Comparison	NR	DNM	A	M
Sustainability	(1) Financial	M	M	M	M
	(2) Organizational	E	E	E	E
	(3) Compliance	M	M	M	M
Renewal Process Tier					
Updated Tier Designation					

Ratings Key			
E	Exceeds Expectations	DNM	Does Not Meet Expectations
M	Meets Expectations	NR	Not Rated
A	Approaches Expectations	NA	Not Applicable

PRIMARY INDICATOR: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

School Performance			
SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Not Rated	Does Not Meet Expectations	Approaches Expectations	Approaches Expectations
Summary: In SY20-21, the school did not receive a rating due to the COVID pandemic which resulted in no statewide accountability for those years. The school did not meet expectations in SY21-22 due to a 1-star school rating on statewide accountability. The school approached expectations in SY22-23 and SY23-24 due to a 2-star school rating on statewide accountability.			

School Comparison			
SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Not Rated	Does Not Meet Expectations	Approaches Expectations	Meets Expectations
Summary: In SY20-21, the school did not receive a rating due to the COVID pandemic which resulted in no statewide accountability for those years. The school did not meet expectations in SY21-22 due to the school earning 1 ELP Progress point as measured by school index score published in the statewide school accountability system. Moreover, the school earned 1 point each for growth in both ELA and Math as published in the statewide school accountability system. The school approached expectations in SY22-23 due to the school earning 1 ELP Progress point as measured by school index score published in the statewide school accountability system. In SY23-24, the school met expectations due to the weighted average proficiency rate of enrolling districts in both Math and ELA being lower than the percent of students proficient at the charter school minus the error value. All other criterion was met in this metric as well. - In statewide accountability, the school had a max school rating of 4 stars, earning 2 out of 3 points in that individual measure. - The school also earned 2 out of 3 points in both Math and ELA growth measures.			

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR 1

Financial Performance			
SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations
Summary: The school met expectations in all years of its charter term. <i>Financial ratings are based primarily on the charter's audit and therefore, financial information lags a year. For example, financial ratings for 2023-24 are based on the charter's FY23 audit.</i>			
1.1 Current Ratio	SY23-24, The school met expectations, and the school met expectations in all years of their charter term		
1.2 Unrestricted Days of Cash	SY23-24, The school met expectations, and the school met expectations in all years of their charter term		
1.3 Debt to Asset Ratio	SY23-24, The school met expectations, and the school met expectations in all years of their charter term		
1.4 Total Margin & 3-Year Aggregate Total Margin	SY23-24, The school met expectations, and the school met expectations in all years of their charter term		
1.5 Debt Service Coverage Ratio	SY23-24, The school met expectations due to the school's debt service coverage ratio is greater than 1.1		

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR 2

Organizational Performance			
SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Exceeds Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Summary: The school exceeded expectations in the years SY20-21, SY21-22 and SY22-23 of its charter term.			
<i>2.1 Organizational School-Specific Goals</i>	This charter does not have organizational school-specific goals.		
<i>2.2 School Environment</i>	Family engagement: In the school-prepared Annual Report. The school highlighted that they use the following for family engagement: • SurveyWorks • BACS Family Organization and their events; documented communications between the Family Organization Coordinator, the Parent Leadership Team and families (the Coordinator and the PLT contacted every Blackstone family at least once over the course of the academic year, either via phone call, text, or email) • Zoom events asking for family feedback regarding school policies; family surveys sent out on an as-needed basis. Student Retention: More than 80% of students enrolled at the end of the previous school year were also enrolled at the beginning of the following year. Waitlist: The school's waitlist does comprise of more than 50% of seats available.		
<i>2.3 Equity and Access</i>	Attrition Data: The charter provided assurances of attrition data analysis in the school-prepared Annual Report. The school reported that a document is shared with the administrators, Deans, Special Education Director, and enrollment staff which lists students who are disenrolling and includes demographic data related to them and the reason for the exit. This is shared any time a student leaves and is reviewed at a minimum 2x per year in a meeting with the administrators and the Special Education Director to review trends.		

	Recruitment & Lottery: No outstanding issues were identified. The school provided lottery data through CSAR. This school is part of the EnrollRI Common Application and received 748 applications. Applicant Pool: The school’s applicant pool as submitted from the CSAR from the lottery shows applicants from Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls
2.4 Dissemination	Sharing Quality Best Practice: The charter provided assurances and descriptions of work related to sharing resources and practice. For example, the school has developed close partnerships with other grantees in the Barr Foundation Wider Learning Ecosystem grant, and have been working with these schools for six years (Manchester HS, Manchester, CT; Common Ground High School, New Haven, CT; Manchester West HS, Manchester, NH; Nokomis Regional High School, Newport, ME; Winooski High School, Winooski, VT). At numerous annual meetings and convenings, the school gives and gets feedback on many school redesign initiatives, including curriculum and proficiency-based assessment structures, advisory programming and overall student support system, ILP (using the Xello platform), college and career planning, and their Class Dean and Team meeting structures. The school also mentioned in their renewal visit that as a member of the League of Charter Schools they have shared best practices with other charters in Rhode Island. BACS’ partnership with a school in Somerville, MA was also an interesting highlight that was captured during the leadership interview.
2.5 Board and Leadership Quality	Board & School Leader Continuous Improvement: The charter provided assurances of continuous improvement activities in the school-prepared Annual Report. The school reported that the board reviewed the State accountability data which included their participation rates, performance, and growth on P/SAT as well as comparisons with 2019 scores, sending districts and stand-alone high schools with open admissions criteria and similar demographics. The board reviews information from administrators, teacher leaders, and students working on the core academic goals within the proficiency-based grading initiative. They also examine how it ties into their overall school improvement plan.

	Board & School Leader Have Systems for Decision-making/ Communication: The charter provided assurances of decision making and communication systems in the school-prepared Annual Report. The school reported that the board reviewed the state accountability data which included our participation rates, performance, and growth on P/SAT as well as comparisons with 2019 scores, sending districts and stand-alone high schools with open admissions criteria and similar demographics. They discussed action steps, and they were considering related to performance in subgroups. They reviewed information from administrators, teacher leaders and students working on the core academic goals within the proficiency-based grading initiative and how it ties into their overall school improvement plan. Board Holds School Leader Accountable: The charter provided assurances of holding school leader(s) accountable in the school-prepared Annual Report. The school reported that members of the Executive Committee conducted informal evaluations with the Executive Director and the Principal/Head of School as the intensive 360 evaluation occurs every three years. Board Composition: There is evidence from the school-prepared Annual Report that members of the board are comprised of a wide range of expertise and show alignment to the school’s mission.
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SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR 3

Compliance			
SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations

Summary:

The school met expectations in the years SY20-21, SY21-22 and SY22-23 of its charter term.

<i>Student Rights</i> (3.1 - 3.5)	Over the course of the term, the charter met for each of the criteria associated with student rights, according to the various RIDE offices responsible for monitoring civil rights, special education, and English learners. The charter has submitted the charter school applicant report each year. The charter has adopted the EnrollRI Charter School Common Application.
<i>Employee Management</i> (3.6 - 3.8)	The charter met for each of the criteria associated with employee management to the various RIDE offices responsible for certification and educator evaluation. There is evidence from document review and the renewal site visit of established HR procedures and a board-approved employee handbook. The school has a staff handbook that outlines school policies, protocols, emergency procedures and other information. The handbook includes also includes a section specific to staff policies/protocols, which documents the school's staff leave policy and grievance protocol.
<i>Health and Safety</i> (3.9-3.12)	The charter met for each of the criteria. The charter provided evidence of facilities inspections and documentation in their renewal document submissions. There are no outstanding issues that were identified in a review of the Annual School Health Report, National School Lunch Program, and the RI Nutritional Requirements. The charter provided evidence of behavior and safety policies in their renewal document submissions. The school's staff handbook documents specific policies that address, for example: social behavior, anti-bullying, child/abuse neglect, non-discrimination, student crisis, emergency protocols (e.g., lockdown, missing child).
<i>Educational Program</i> (3.13-3.16)	The charter met each year. There is evidence from document review and the renewal site visit that the school is practicing the essential educational program components defined by its charter and following state and federal requirements. The charter provided evidence that curriculum is aligned to state adopted standards in their renewal document submissions and on-site. No outstanding issues were identified in education related reporting. Notes on educational program, curriculum, assessment.
<i>School Leadership</i> (3.17-3.19)	The charter met in each of the criteria associated with school leadership. The board's bylaws include a committee structure and term limits. There is evidence from school assurances, document review, and the renewal site visit that the board complied with posting agendas and minutes for public meetings, public record requests and the

	Code of Ethics. There is evidence from document review and the renewal site visit that the board has established policies and procedures for addressing conflicts of interest and complaints.
Financial Management (3.20 - 3.28)	The charter met each year.