

CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL APPLICATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Name of Charter School: **Brighten Academy Charter School**
 Proposed Charter Term Length: **5 years**
 Current Grade Range: **K-8**
 Grade range at the end of the charter term: **K-8**
 Expected enrollment at the end of the charter term: **840**

This application was approved by the Douglas County Local Board of Education on _____, 202__

For each year of the NEW charter term, indicate the number of students the charter school plans to serve.

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Year 1	88	88	92	96	104	108	90	90	90					846
Year 2	88	88	92	96	104	108	90	90	90					846
Year 3	88	88	92	96	104	108	90	90	90					846
Year 4	88	88	92	96	104	108	90	90	90					846
Year 5	88	88	92	96	104	108	90	90	90					846

- 1. State the charter school’s mission and describe why this initiative is important to the community it serves. Also provide a brief description of any defining features of the school. Include how stakeholders were involved in the petition process and how they will continue participating. (350 words or less)**

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During the current charter term, Brighten and a team of board members, administration, staff, and parents worked collaboratively to rewrite the mission statement to better embrace the growth and changes in the school over the prior two charter terms. The new mission adopted is as follows:

The mission of Brighten Academy is to nurture habits of scholarship and ethical character in a joyful, engaging, rigorous, and equitable learning environment. Inspired educators, in partnership with parents and the community, will ensure measured growth in every student every year and empower students to create a brighter future for our world.

The mission statement, along with the morning verse which can be found below, is recited daily by students and staff as a reminder of who we are and where we want to be as a school.

We come together from many different places to learn, to work, and to play. At Brighten Academy, we are Crew. By modeling the 7 Cs and showing character in word and deed, we will succeed. We will ALL succeed because we are Crew.

Brighten has worked collaboratively with the Douglas County School System and played a key role in assisting the district in meeting its mission of preparing college and career ready students. In addition, the school has supported the district's transition to magnet choice high schools, as well as provided a positive model for local governance and financial efficiency. Brighten has also helped bring both students and teachers back to public education. The school also provides a unique learning model with its emphasis in EL Education's Dimensions of Achievement and focus on developing effective learners and ethical people.

The current charter renewal incorporates a diverse set of stakeholder voices. Referencing the Strategic Plan, which included staff and board input and the EL Work Plan (the school improvement plan), which included administration and instructional staff input, a Charter Renewal Committee comprised of both certified and non-certified staff drafted this charter document, which was ultimately reviewed and approved by the Brighten Board and presented to the Douglas County School System, staff, and parent community.

- 2. Describe the charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district(s). Include mention of any waivers of state law and SBOE rule that are needed to implement the academic program. Be sure to describe any special characteristics of your charter school, such as a special population or some other feature or features which enhance educational opportunities. (350 words or less)**

In the current charter term, Brighten Academy adopted the EL Education model which focuses on developing effective learners and ethical people. This model aligns perfectly with the long-term goal of providing an application-based, integrated, project-based curriculum that promotes social responsibility and a strong, positive school culture. The Douglas County School System does not provide anything comparable in its program offerings in any elementary or middle school, and this model has been attractive to many parents within the community. The school also employs both student and adult Crew, which develops a positive and pervasive school culture. Brighten Academy also adopted restorative practices, conducts student-led conferences, and has student passages and capstone projects.

Brighten's school model truly maximizes the privilege of the waivers provided in The Charter Schools Act in its instructional programming. Key waivers utilized are included below:

WAIVER	PURPOSE
Scheduling and Seat Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Implement cross curriculum, project based EL Education instructional program · Provide for instructional planning, staff development, and collaboration time weekly · Meet the needs of a K-8 school with respect to student start and end times
Selection of Instructional Materials and Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Align with cross curricular, project-based EL Learning and Eureka Math Curricula · Remain fiscally responsible · Select norm-referenced NWEA MAP assessment system to monitor and report on growth · Select technology programs to better meet virtual needs
Certain Program Guidelines in areas such as Early Intervention, Remedial, and Gifted Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Use blended models that work in a small K-8 school setting · Maximize instructional opportunity and staffing · Remain fiscally responsible
Placement and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop readiness indicators · Develop Learning Passages aligned with the EL Learning model
Categorical Spending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Deploy funds towards priority areas of the school that support school programming · Select vendors aligned with mission or programmatic needs · Remain fiscally responsible

Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Organizational structure more appropriate to a K-8 small school· Efficient use of non-certified staff in areas of administration, as well as instructional support to reduce class sizes· Remain fiscally responsible· Adjust job descriptions to better align with programs or to fulfill responsibilities
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3. Describe the charter school’s organizational structure, specifically focusing on its innovation and need for flexibility, its general partnership structure with an educational service provider (ESP) if any, and the school’s community interest and need. (350 words or less)

Brighten Academy has adopted EL Learning’s Dimensions of Achievement that include: Mastery of Content Skills and Knowledge, High Quality Work, and Character. The organizational plan, staff development, scheduling, and financial priorities assist the school in effectively employing a rigorous cross-curricular, project-based instructional program that ensures goals are met.

Brighten’s current organizational structure includes an administrative team consisting of a principal who oversees an instructional arm (two vice principals) and an operational arm (business and student services manager). The school employs certified staff for grades K-8 serving general education, special education, remedial, ELL, and gifted programs who report to one of the administrators. Paraprofessional support for general education and special education report to certified teaching staff. A number of other key positions support the instructional and operational aspects of the school including a media specialist, counselor, office clerical staff, an SST coordinator, and a safety officer. The school contracts for its food services program, as well as certain special education services such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical therapy. Although contracted vendors, these individuals are viewed as part of the Brighten

family. Brighten does not employ a for-profit or nonprofit educational service provider and does not plan to do so in the future.

PAST PERFORMANCE

Question 1 - Accountability Report for Each Year of the Charter Term

See Exhibit 5.

Question 2

Describe how the charter school performed in meeting the academic and organizational goals set forth in its current charter contract.

Brighten Academy has achieved a successful third charter term and successfully navigated austerity cuts, changes to demographics, and the pandemic. The implementation of EL Education's Core Practices, as well as several strategic academic, organizational, and budgetary improvements was a sustaining and stabilizing factor of the school's success. As Brighten adopted EL practices, staff recognized the need to better monitor student achievement in a way that looked at measurable growth over time and contextualized students' progress with the students across the nation. The State's assessment was (and continues to be) in flux, so leadership researched a reliable tool to use over time. The Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment developed by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) was in perfect alignment with the school's needs. There was also a need identified for reliable surveys more closely aligned to Brighten's mission and core beliefs, and therefore, a comprehensive survey tool of more than 30 elements was developed. Brighten continues to rely on state measures as well.

Academic:

As evidenced in the State's Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) data below, Brighten has continued to not only meet and exceed academic excellence, but it has continued to raise the bar in this area. In

previous and current charter terms, the focus has remained on meeting and exceeding state and local achievement.

Georgia Milestone Assessment System (GMAS) data proves Brighten Academy has a higher percentage of students scoring on a Proficient and Distinguished level compared to state and local counterparts since 2007. This same level of achievement is also evident in CCRPI scores in both the previous and the current charter term. While Brighten Academy and its stakeholders recognize that the CCRPI score for the 2018-2019 year is slightly lower than that of local and state schools, it should be noted that the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) divides elementary and middle school grade bands into two separate schools. This important factor determines the way in which the school's CCRPI is calculated. Although CCRPI does show areas of opportunity for growth, it is noteworthy that Brighten continues to meet and exceed the state and county with content mastery (GMAS achievement) and remains well above average in achievement and growth on the NWEA MAP assessment, a norm-referenced measure.

In analyzing the dip in CCRPI scores for 2018-2019, it was determined that progress points and closing the gap were deficit areas. There were additional opportunities for improvement identified which include developing extended writing skills in third and fifth grades and developing the critical thinking component of math in fifth graders. To address progress and closing the gap, the school implemented common monthly assessments to monitor progress between the three NWEA Math Growth assessments. Administration and the teacher leadership team analyzed the transition from 2nd to 3rd grade reading and math and realigned grade-level benchmarks and pacing to better reflect the rigor required in 3rd grade. Brighten has also implemented Write Score in grades 3 and 5 to help explicitly teach the skills needed for extended writing. The EL Education reading curriculum and Eureka Math in grades K-8 has been fully implemented and the school is beginning to see gains in achievement and growth according to NWEA MAP and in interim assessments. These schoolwide curriculum programs provide better continuity with scaffolding, pacing, and consistency in instructional methods. And finally, administration meets weekly

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with all grades levels, as well as EIP, Gifted, and Special Education to support planning and to more deeply analyze data in order to make more timely adjustments for growth and closing the achievement gap.

The data presented in the 2018-2019 CCRPI report also shows students in certain subgroups are in need of intentional, strategic instruction. As a result, the school implemented several changes and added additional resources to help target identified needs, including adding three faculty members that specialize in early intervention. Faculty members continue to closely gather data and analyze the growth in student achievement, with an emphasis on subgroup populations. Staff members collect and utilize multiple forms of assessment data to support students in building and applying critical thinking skills to meet growth and achievement goals. In addition, the leadership team, with support from the Douglas County School System, reviewed all Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and implemented additional evidence-based practices to bolster achievement. The school employs a counselor to support the social and emotional needs of all students, but particularly at-risk populations. The leadership team also engages in Evidence-Based School Improvement, a shift from evaluating inputs to measuring outcomes. The school improvement plan has been modified to disaggregate data for subgroups and established specific interim growth goals for these populations.

CCRPI Comparison Scores for Brighten, Douglas County School System, and State of GA 2016-2019

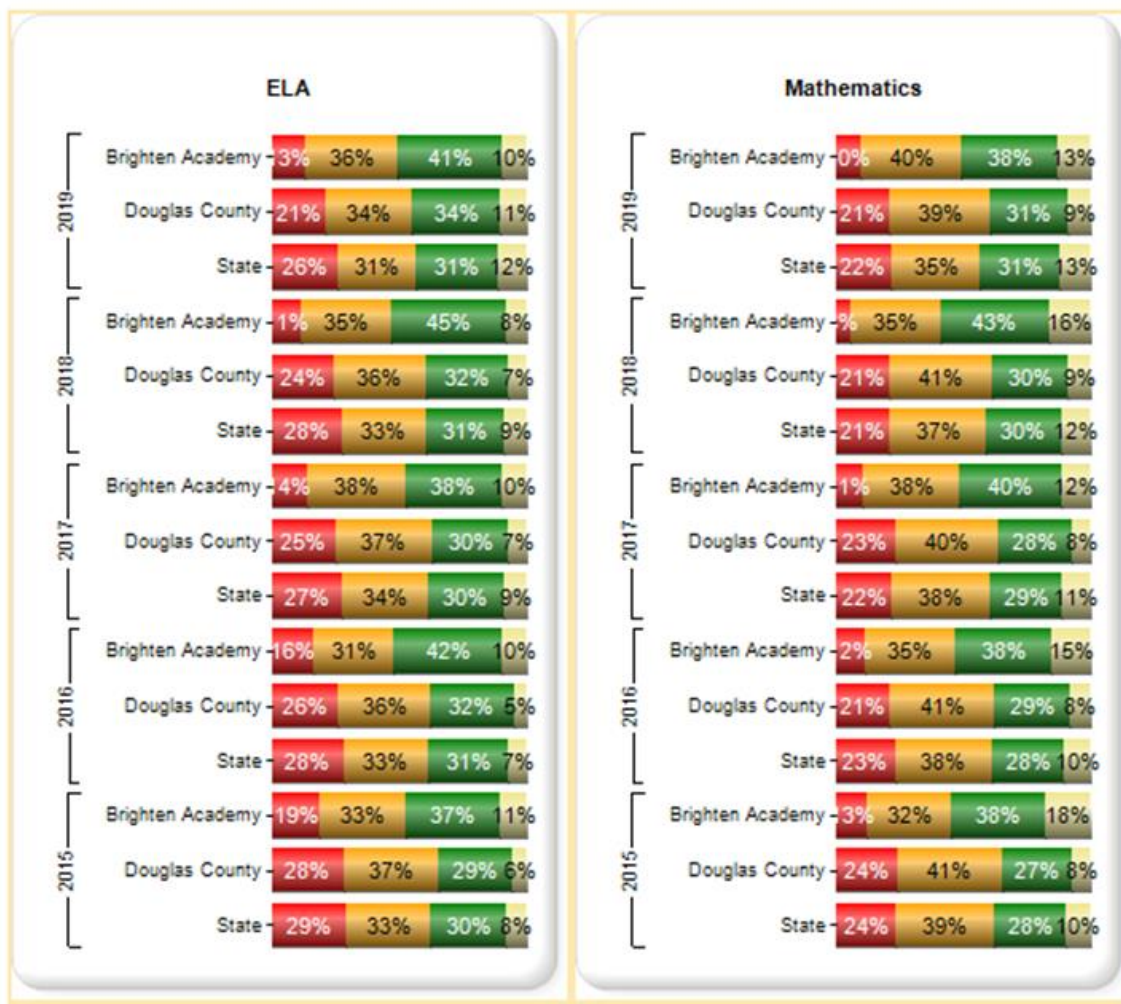
	2016			2017			2018			2019		
	GA	DCSS	BACS	GA	DCSS	BACS	GA	DCSS	BACS	GA	DCSS	BACS
Elementary	71.7	78.3	79.1	72.9	69.9	80.5	77.8	81.7	89.0	79.9	72.7	68.9
Middle	71.5	72.0	76.7	73.0	68.4	85.5	76.2	76.9	84.7	77.0	78.2	78.4
Total	73.6	77.6	78.5	75.0	73.2	81.6	76.6	76.9	87.9	78.8	75.9	71.7

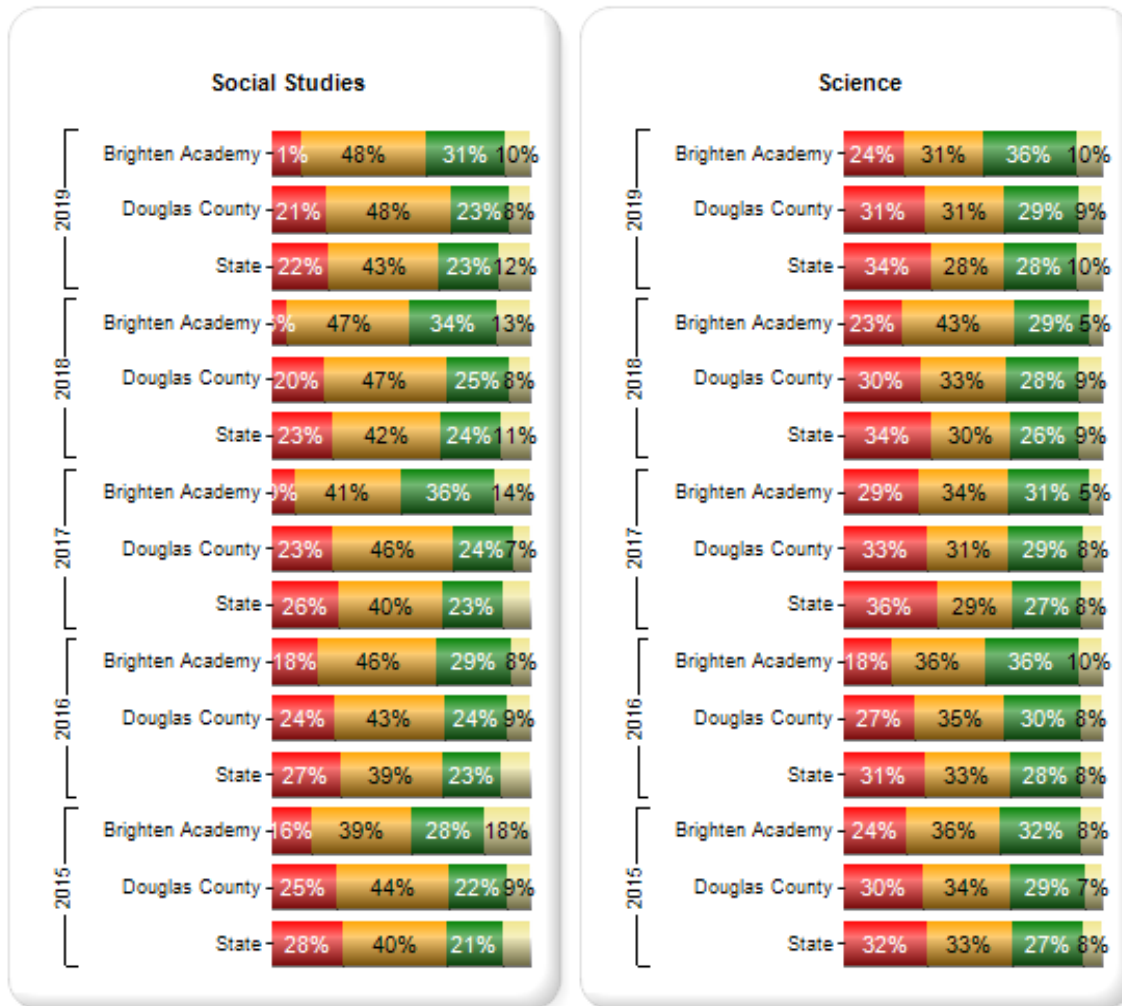
The 2019-2020 school year was a year like no other. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia schools were exempted from statewide testing. Since students did not participate in statewide testing, Brighten can not use GMAS as a measure of proof of surpassing state and local schools on state standardized tests. Even without state standardized achievement data, Brighten Academy stands firm on the data collected

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from MAP scores, which is a norm-referenced assessment. Brighten students have continued to outperform the nation by tracking 25 to 30 percentile points higher than the national norm. In addition, the graphs below demonstrate Brighten’s success in educating a diverse population of students and continuing to increase the ability to outperform local and state averages on the state accountability assessment.

Brighten Academy GMAS from 2015-2019





Organizational:

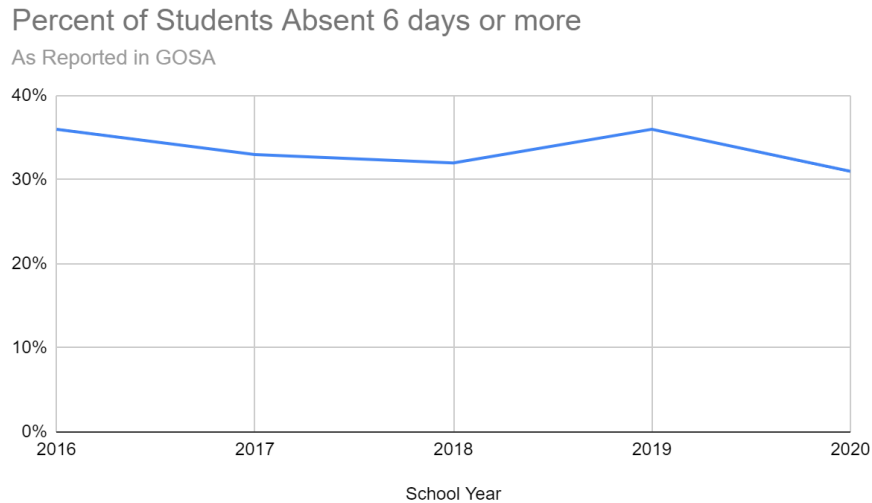
Brighten Academy has met or exceeded organizational goals each year of the charter term. Every year, members of the Governing Board have met training requirements provided by a State Board of Education approved trainer on topics of importance to effective governance. New board members receive specialized training in their first year of service to meet the requirement of six additional hours. The flexibility of in-person and web-based, on-demand training has increased access to topics that are both required and relevant to the needs of board members. Our Board Policy Manual (Appendix 1) includes a Code of Ethics for board members, as well as a Conflict of Interest Policy.

Operational Goals:

Brighten Academy has consistently achieved a high daily attendance rate of above 95%.

2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
98.46	97.01	95.74	No CCRPI data

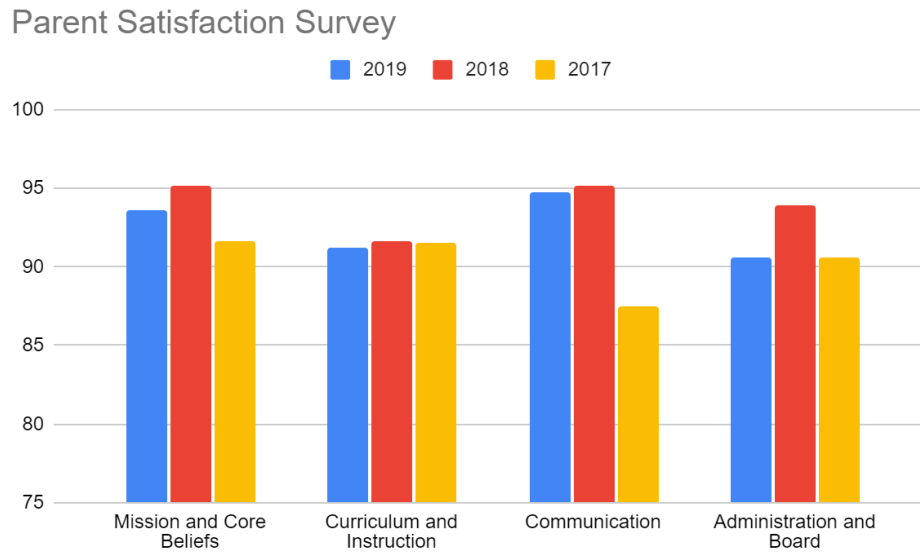
Although attendance rates are very high, Brighten Academy did not meet the goal of fewer than 10% of students having less than six absences each year of the charter term; however, as observed in the graph below, there was a significant gain in attendance rates from the 2018-2019 to the 2019-2020 school year, and attendance trends are monitored for the improvement goal of two percentage points annually.



Brighten’s attendance policy is in alignment with the local school district attendance policy. A student may have up to ten absences excused by the parent, with additional excuses permitted from a medical professional. Staff will continue to contact parents for improved attendance, provide attendance incentives, and per policy, refer chronically absent students for support systems.

Brighten Academy has collected parent satisfaction data throughout the charter term with mission and charter aligned surveys. Data on these surveys continues to show that parents are highly satisfied with the school on these critical elements, and Brighten has consistently achieved greater than 90% satisfaction.

The only element with lower than 90% was in communication for one term, and focused efforts in this area brought us to nearly 95% satisfaction in the following two years.



The abrupt end to the 2019-2020 school year and continuation of operations with in-person, hybrid, and virtual models all being implemented has required the school to rethink parental satisfaction in novel areas not relevant in prior years. At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, focus shifted to meeting student and parent needs in a totally virtual setting and planning for the upcoming school year with three learning modalities. On multiple occasions throughout this school year, Brighten has surveyed parents to ensure that the Safe Start Plan, in response to COVID-19, supports their child’s education and physical well-being while following guidance from the CDC. Brighten has maintained 100% enrollment, while the local school district has sustained some enrollment losses. Year-end survey data related to overall parent satisfaction, as well as parent & staff feedback related to the hybrid learning plans offered this year will be used in planning for the 2021-2022 school year.

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Teachers remain satisfied with the overall quality of their job as evidenced by the Georgia Personnel Survey:

2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
90	89.00	88	No data

Referencing the Georgia Personnel Survey, Brighten Academy did not meet the goal of at least 90% of surveyed teachers reporting satisfaction with the overall quality of their job. The administrative team is dedicated to understanding the needs of the instructional staff and meets with grade-level and specialized teams at least twice monthly to hear their concerns and support problem solving. The 2020-2021 school year has brought many unknowns to the staff of Brighten Academy. A weekly questionnaire called the Wednesday Wellness Check allows for an alternative line of communication through which staff can reach out to the administrators with feelings, concerns, and suggestions. Brighten continues to commit to supporting teachers and building a culture of collegiality in which all staff can support each other.

Brighten Academy met the goal as a K-8 school each year of the charter term on Climate Star Rating:

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Elementary	3 stars	3 stars	3 stars	No data
Middle School	5 stars	5 stars	5 stars	No data
Average K-8	4 stars	4 stars	4 stars	No data
Final Scores	91.6	91.4	90.9	No data
Elementary Scale	87.2 - 91.7 = 3 stars			
Middle School Scale	89.5 + = 5 stars			

Although this goal has been met, Brighten will continue to disaggregate data to identify areas for improvement. Components of the CCRPI Star Rating include attendance, discipline data, safe and substance-free learning environment, and student, staff, and parent survey data. The largest opportunity for improvement is in attendance days missed of less than six.

Question 3

Describe the school's current financial situation.

Brighten has remained a good steward of public funds in the current charter term. In the last three years of audits, Brighten has demonstrated effective financial management of public funds in administration of the school. Audit findings indicate that the school has remained in compliance with provisions of laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements. Brighten remains without liens or encumbrances on assets and continues to be compliant with the IRS Section 501(c)(3) designation. The school maintains its responsibility with contributions to the Teacher Retirement System of Georgia and continually maintains payroll and all other financial debt payments on time and as contracted. Brighten adopts an annual budget for its general fund that is in accordance with the Quality Basic Education Act, O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-167 and ensures transparency in communication to the public about budget proposal and adoption, financial policy additions and revisions, monthly financial standing, and end-of-year audit results. Finally, Brighten has maintained internal controls and appropriately followed school financial policies with fidelity. In two of the last three years of completed audits in the current charter term, Brighten has had no material findings reported and no reports on non-compliance material to financial statements. In 2017, a material finding was noted wherein the general fund was not maintained consistently on a modified accrual basis. This was rectified, and no further findings in 2018 or 2019 have been noted.

Brighten remains financially solvent. As reported by the Management Discussion and Analysis (MD&A) as of June 30, 2019 (the most recently completed audit), Brighten's combined ending fund balance was \$3,045,019 (\$1,637,801 general fund and \$1,380,757 restricted for debt service fund.) The fund balance has continued to increase year after year from the prior years (2018: \$2,893,081; 2017: \$2,786,433.)

The largest challenge the school has faced has been a cut in equalization and austerity in the current year. Brighten has applied for and received the Paycheck Protection Program forgivable loan, and also

renegotiated several contracts in order to save money to overcome this obstacle and ensure the school maintains good financial footing.

Brighten has two primary priorities for surplus funds in the next charter term. First, the school is committed to effectively implementing a new leadership structure with a superintendent, principal, and two vice principals to better serve the school. Surplus funds will go towards funding these key positions. Second, Brighten will maintain the original property at Brookmont Parkway with the goal of paying off this debt. Subsequently, the school can then do a short sale of the property, which will free up operational funds to help ensure a better long-term financial position.

As noted in the past three years of audits and anecdotal records from the school level, Brighten has had no actual or accused instances of fraudulent behavior by school staff, governing board members, or anyone else associated with the school during the current charter term.

Question 4

Overview of the School's Current Governance Structure

Brighten Academy's autonomous governing board oversees the school leader and monitors decisions related to instruction, human resources, finances, and operations of Brighten Academy to ensure that the school meets its mission, vision, and performance goals and objectives outlined within the charter. The Governing Board operates in accordance with the Brighten Academy bylaws, nonprofit requirements, the charter contract, policies, and applicable laws relevant to public charter school boards. The board is compliant with provisions of O.C.G.A. 50-14-1 et seq. (Open Public Meetings, 2010) and O.C.G.A. 50-18-70 et seq. (Inspections of Public Records, 2010) in a manner consistent with the Charter Schools Act of 1998, as amended, and in accordance with the Constitution of the State of Georgia.

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As trustees of public funds, the Governing Board is responsible for ensuring the school's long-term financial stability and integrity of the charter. The board sets the strategic plan and ensures that the school fulfills its mission. Board Members recognize that to fulfill these obligations, they pledge to personally contribute needed resources and talents to maintain the school's success.

The structure and practices of the Governing Board are dictated by the schools's bylaws (Exhibit 2) and Board Policy Manual (Appendix 1). These policies have been created with the collaboration of the Governing Board and administrative team throughout the schools' 15 years of operation. The policies that dictate the practices and procedures of the board include:

- Board Functions and Responsibilities Calendar B1-E1;
- Board Member Responsibilities and Disclosure B2-E1;
- Code of Ethics for Board Members B3;
- Executive Session B4;
- Executive Session Affidavit B4-E1;
- New Board Member Transition B5-R1;
- Regulation Departing Board Member Transition B5-R2;
- Policy Revision, Repeal, Dissemination B6;
- Policy Dissemination and Review B7;
- Role Sort and Functions B8-E1;
- Default Policy Procedures B9;
- Board Meeting Agendas B10;
- Financial Reports B11;
- Board Member Background Check B12;
- Board Development B13;
- Board Attendance B14;
- Sponsors Board B15;

- Board Member Resignation B16.

In accordance with the school's bylaws, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, employees of Brighten Academy or spouses of employees may not participate in discussion or voting related to personnel matters or fiscal matters where direct financial benefit may exist.

The Governing Board consists of four primary officers including a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, whose roles are defined within the school's bylaws (Exhibit 2) and no more than seven additional members. The Governing Board represents a broad population of parents and experienced professionals to govern the school in areas of expertise including, but not limited to: education, finance, marketing, legal, fundraising, real estate, strategic planning, risk management, and other business-related skills.

Members of the Brighten Academy Governing Board serve in a voluntary capacity and are not paid for their service except for reasonable costs incurred for exercising board duties in accordance with financial policies. Board members are fingerprinted and have criminal background checks. The Treasurer of the board has a financial background check. All new board members serve three-year terms.

Each April, Governing Board elections take place to fill any existing or upcoming vacancies. Elections follow the procedures explained in Appendix B, Section 5 of the school's bylaws (Exhibit 2). Brighten Academy's diverse board reflects the student and community population.

The current board composition includes:

Board Member	Primary Role	Area of Expertise	Personal Affiliation
Matt Markel	Board President	Executive level business and finance	Parent
Dr. Jill Drake	Vice President Assistant Governing Board Chair Executive Committee Chair of the Policy Committee	Curriculum Development and Assessment Mathematics Education Early Childhood Education Academic policy and procedures	Parent
Ricky McClure-Pritchett	Treasurer Finance Committee Chair	Regional Director real estate firm BA in Operations Masters in Accounting Masters in Financial Systems Entrepreneur	Parent
Marcela Audetat	Secretary	Marketing and Fundraising	Parent
Charles Camp	Board Member Facilities Committee	Line foreman Marketing Operational initiatives Revenue generation Team productivity Customer service	Parent
Erik Newby	Board member	Sales Fundraising	Parent
Odette Flemming	Board Member	Community outreach and Communications Education consulting and coaching	Parent
Melanie McMorrin	Community and Resource Development (CARD) Committee	Marketing director Fundraising	Parent
Kristen Moses	Board Member; CARD Committee	Fundraising Marketing Public relations	Parent
Dondell Patterson	Policy Committee	Legal Advocacy	Parent

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		Community outreach Policy	
Lisa McDonald	Ex Officio	School Leadership	Director

Brighten’s Governing Board has governing and policy-making authority for the school and exercises its duties and responsibilities including, but not limited to:

- annual evaluations of the school director;
- approval of restructure of school's organization;
- maintaining a reserve funding account;
- approval of final school budget and budget amendment;
- holding the school director accountable for school improvement plan implementation and timeline;
- ensuring proper compliance with, and execution of, the terms of the charter contract;
- giving approval for purchases that exceed \$5,000;
- providing for succession pathways;
- selecting, hiring, and monitoring the Chief Financial Officer (CFO);
- establishing and maintaining all policies governing the operation of the school;
- ensuring that the school adheres to applicable local, state, and federal law, regulation, and policy;
- hearing and acting upon student, parent/guardian, and employee grievances, where policy requires;
- coordinating board-level fundraising from sources other than state and local government;
- hearing and rendering decisions on issues brought to the Board’s attention;
- development and assuring fulfillment of the school’s strategic plan;
- revision of school mission;
- facility expansion and renovation approvals;
- financial investments and oversight of bond compliance;

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- approval of school calendar;
- approval financial audit.

More recently, due to the state of the country in regard to COVID-19, the Governing Board has approved several key decisions including delaying the school start date to August 10th, adopting a safe-start hybrid model, hiring five additional staff positions to support the safety needs for face-to-face and virtual instruction, and amending the attendance policy to define attendance and excuses to follow local and state guidance during the public health crisis. With regard to fiscal responsibility, the board reallocated a substantial portion of the operating budget to a higher-yielding, interest-earning account. The board also submitted on Brighten Academy's behalf an application to receive funding through the Payroll Protection Plan (PPP), to offset austerity and FTE reductions for the 2020-2021 school year.

The school leader's scope of authority includes, but is not limited to:

- recommending and assisting in monitoring the budget;
- presenting monthly budget, personnel, behavior, and enrollment reports to the board;
- personnel decisions including hiring, evaluating, training, and contract renewal;
- contributing to the creation of the school improvement plan and ensuring implementation and achievement of school improvement goals;
- recommending new policies and revisions to current policies and enforcing staff and student policies;
- health and safety;
- facility management oversight;
- school nutrition program oversight;
- enterprise operations such as the After School Program oversight;
- curriculum and instruction;
- community relations liaison;

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- accountability report for authorizers;
- school-wide and community communications;
- school discipline matters;
- all school operations decisions (Appendix 2).

Specific examples of decisions the school leader has made on behalf of the school include writing the school improvement plan, planning staff development, developing the daily master schedule, incorporation of restorative justice behavior protocols, drafting surveys to gather parental feedback, and completing the application to become an EL Mentor and Credentialed School. In response to COVID-19, the school leader drafted a schedule that would support social distancing and ensured teachers could differentiate instruction for in-person students and virtual students, as well as adopted virtual programs and other tools and resources to facilitate learning using hybrid models. The school leader has also submitted applications and secured multiple grants for the school.

As a check and balance, according to the Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems Domain Four, Elements Three and Six (2010), "The board solicits and receives recommendations from the superintendent on any proposed policies" and "The board holds the superintendent accountable for the consistent implementation of adopted policies." The board holds the school leader accountable through approval of school leader recommendations and continued updates submitted by the school leader during board meetings on items previously approved. Continual accountability is detailed in the Board Functions and Responsibilities Calendar (Appendix 1: B1-E1). The school leader is also accountable for ensuring the school is compliant on the state and local levels with regard to the charter goals. Annual accountability is done through a process of self-evaluation completed by the school leader that is peer-reviewed and then shared back to the school leader. Elements of the self-evaluation tool include proficiency in the areas of instructional leadership, school climate, planning and assessment, faculty

evaluation, and human resources management, with an emphasis on organizational leadership, professionalism, communication, and community outreach.

Brighten's Board policy provides structures to hold vendors, independent contractors, and charter partners accountable. For example, Board policy dictates that contracts over \$25,000 must go through the sealed bid process and receive approval from school administration, the Board Treasurer, and the Governing Board. The policy also requires that the scope of work included in the Request For a Proposal (RFP) be vetted by the appropriate board committee and then approved by the Governing Board. The coordinated effort between all levels of school leadership ensures that there is alignment within the scope of work needed as well as agreement within the contract terms.

The committee structure of the Governing Board is instrumental in holding charter partners and independent contractors accountable for contracts that are below the \$25,000 threshold. As the annual budget is developed, the board-level committees work with school administration to coordinate and locate vendors who support the school's operational and strategic planning goals each year. These contracts are incorporated into the annual budget, which is presented to the full board and the community during at least two public hearings before seeking approval before the full governing board. It is standard procedure for all contracts to be reviewed annually, where most contain a 90-day cancellation clause. Since all contracts are renewed annually, the quality of service is reviewed each year and the contract is canceled if the vendor does not meet expectations. All vendors are subject to the guidelines described in Policy D12 Preferred Vendors (Appendix 1). Vendors who are unable to maintain good standing or who violate the guidelines of the Preferred Vendors Policy will be placed on the Preferred Vendors Disbarment List (Appendix 1: D12-E1). One current outside vendor is SLA Management. SLA provides the breakfast and lunch program for staff and students. The established goal states that their services do not cost Brighten Academy any money. According to the Food Service Management Policy, C5, financial reports are submitted to the Board on a monthly basis (Appendix 1).

All contracts and purchases of supplies, materials, equipment, and contractual services for Brighten Academy are made on the basis of quality, price, and service and must follow specific guidelines for the type and number of bids necessary based on the cost of products in question; see policy D2: Bids and Quotations (Appendix 1) for more/specific details. Acquisition of all goods and services are subject to the sample limits, except when a clear emergency exists or a particular item may be obtained from only one known supply source. Proper documentation is maintained regarding all such exceptions. Purchases are not divided into smaller units in order to circumvent the Bids and Quotations policy.

The Governing Board follows state laws and regulations related to board training. The purpose of board training is to equip present and future board members with the knowledge needed to fulfill their duties and responsibilities, as board leadership is a key component in Brighten's success. Each board member is required to complete at least nine hours of training per year as required by O.C.G.A. 20-2-2072 and the State Board of Education Rule 160-4-9-.01 and new members are required to complete an additional six hours as stated in the 2016 charter contract. New member training includes financial governance, funding and budgeting, and best practices in charter school governance. All members of the Governing Board currently and will continue to receive annual training on basics of chartering, introduction to the school mission, core beliefs, charter, fiduciary duties, board roles and responsibilities, conflicts of interest, the Open Meetings Act, and the Open Records Act. To ensure that training remains a priority, the operating budget includes development funds for the Governing Board.

All Governing Board members complete a yearly self-assessment that influences the specific board development plan for the upcoming year. For example, in the 2020-2025 strategic planning cycle, debt reduction has been identified as a priority, and thus, relevant training or development will be sought. To ensure that the Governing Board remains compliant on required training and has access to high quality information, training is delivered via multiple avenues. Board members can access web-based, on-

demand training through a training partnership, as well as participate in in-person training as a group or as individuals. The Governing Board also initiates their own learning in ongoing professional development including, but not limited to: conferences, speakers, professional articles, and strategic planning priorities as determined necessary by the board self-evaluation and recommendations from whole-board governance training. The current board president has further developed the board through his experience with corporate boards and includes initiatives in monthly agendas, and the school director is an approved board trainer. Development opportunities shall be documented and provided in the school's annual report to the school district. In addition to the yearly training mentioned above, for the 2020-2021 school year, the State Board of Education approved that training organization Georgia Charter Schools Association (GCSA) will provide training opportunities including metrics to measure effective use of committees, effective oversight of your school leader, induction, orientation, mentoring of new board members, planning for charter renewal, succession planning, the basics of Special Education, introduction to fundraising, and ethics for charter boards (Exhibit 6). As required by the State Board of Education Rule 160-4-9-.01, Brighten hires a trainer approved by the State Board of Education, and the contract is approved by the Governing Board.

Question 5

Describe how the school provides state-and-federally mandated services to students with disabilities.

Brighten Academy actively supports and promotes the social, emotional, and academic growth and development of all students. Brighten works in close partnership with the Douglas County School System (DCSS) in delivering services to students who qualify for special education. Qualified teachers trained to differentiate instruction for a range of diverse students teach students with special needs. The IEP committee, which may include one representative from the Douglas County School System, determines the least restrictive environment when deciding on placement of a student.

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Brighten Academy complies with all regulatory requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Brighten continues to work collaboratively with the Douglas County School System to maintain a system that meets the needs of the students and provides them with services from licensed/certified staff or consultants in a manner consistent with state and federal law. To go above and beyond compliance and ensure measured growth in every student, Brighten utilizes the NWEA MAP assessment and other tools to identify opportunities for additional remediation and previewing to close skill gaps by deploying all available staff during a designated intervention period of the day. When feasible, scheduling of small group instruction takes place so that students can receive additional grade-level instruction in academic content areas of deficit. The Special Education teacher frequently plans collaboratively with an assigned vertical team.

The full continuum of services is reviewed at each IEP meeting to ensure the least restrictive environment (LRE) is employed. The school will continue to follow all processes, utilize the same forms and technology, and attend all professional development as recommended by DCSS. Most specialized services will continue to be provided by the school district or its contracted vendors including audiology, speech, vision, psychology, occupational and physical therapy, and behavioral health services. As the Local Education Agency (LEA), the Douglas County School System will continue to provide special education services to low-incidence populations including, but not limited to, hearing or visually impaired students, students requiring full-time or significant medical care, and students eligible for supplemental special education services. In exchange, the Douglas County School District retains all special education federal funds and a portion of the authorizer fee negotiated to support the cost of oversight and education of low-incidence populations and students requiring supplemental services.

Early identification of students with learning, physical, or behavioral/emotional impairment is in place to promote academic success and ensure appropriate programming.

Existing IEPs: Post lottery, and as soon as practicable after enrollment, IEP records are transferred and reviewed to ensure proper placement and IEP compliance.

Pre-referral: The faculty will continue to focus on adapting/modifying instructional/management techniques to meet a child's needs before he/she is evaluated for specialized services. Tier II processes that include universal screeners and data-based interventions are employed. Students who fail to adequately progress with the intervention will be referred to the Student Support Team (Tier III).

Student Support Team (SST)/Referral: In compliance with IDEA guidelines and No Child Left Behind, including employment of the Response to Intervention Model, Brighten Academy identifies a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) committee to review an individual student's strengths and areas of concerns. This multidisciplinary team plans research and evidence-based strategies and organizes resources for addressing challenges and concerns about a student. Stakeholders such as parents, educational specialists, regular education teachers, administrators, and other advocates are invited to participate in various capacities throughout the MTSS process.

Implementation of the Pyramid of Intervention/Response to Intervention Model precedes student referrals for comprehensive educational evaluation to determine eligibility and the need for special education, unless an obvious disability is noted.

Assessment/Evaluation: Once a student is referred to special education from the MTSS team or other appropriate source, the evaluation and placement process is completed without undue delay and in accordance with district protocols, state rules, and federal regulations. Prior to conducting an initial evaluation, a school representative contacts the parent/guardian and schedules a conference regarding the following:

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- The reasons for assessment
- To describe the materials and procedures that will be used to obtain information about the student
- To explain the rights of the parents/guardian and school district related to assessment
- To determine the student's primary language and proficiency
- To describe alternate means, as appropriate
- To obtain written consent for release of confidential information from a third party, as appropriate
- To obtain written consent to perform the assessment/evaluation

Parents are strongly encouraged to participate and contribute pertinent information during this period.

Their perspectives and experiences with the student are of great value and are considered throughout the evaluation process. Licensed staff and/or consultants perform the evaluation and share the results with parents and other faculty members. The conference can be held in conjunction with the MTSS meeting when the assessment is recommended if the parent is in attendance.

In accordance with state rule 160-4-7-.05 and 160-4-7-.09 Brighten Academy parents receive a copy of their Procedural Safeguards/Parent Rights in the following circumstances:

1. Every time an IEP meeting is held;
2. Upon initial referral or parent request for evaluation;
3. Upon the receipt of the first state complaint in a school year;
4. Upon receipt of the first request for a due process hearing in a school year;
5. Upon notification by the LEA to the parent of the decision to remove the child from his or her current placement and the removal constitutes a change of placement under the discipline provisions of IDEA and state rules because of a violation of a code of student conduct; and
6. Upon request by parent.

Parent rights are explained orally, in the parent/guardian's native language, or in their natural mode of communication. Parents are encouraged to join in the identification and referral process. Parents of a Brighten Academy student who are questioning their child's progress, either developmentally or academically, first request a conference with their child's teacher. At any time, parents may request an evaluation by submitting a written request for evaluation to the school.

Brighten Academy ensures that all evaluation procedures and eligibility determinations are established and implemented in accordance with state rule 160-4-7-.07 or other rules or laws promulgated during the charter period.

Individual Education Plan: If the eligibility team determines that the student meets eligibility criteria established under the IDEA Categories of Eligibility section (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-150; 20-2-152; 20-2-160; 20-2-161; 20-2-168; 20-2-1160) and is in need of special education services, the student, parent(s) and staff develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to address the area(s) of deficit in accordance with the required procedures.

The student's parents will continue to be considered an equal member of the child's IEP Committee, which also includes: the regular education teacher, the special education teacher and/or coordinator, the school administrator, the assessment team members, and possibly a representative from Douglas County School System. Other members as required will be present such as the test administrator when the student is limited English Proficient, the student when appropriate, and other related service personnel or individuals that the parent or school deems appropriate..

The IEP states what special education and related services Brighten Academy will provide, and when and where those services will be provided. An IEP form is completed describing the special educational services. Implementation begins as described in the IEP.

Review/Re-evaluation: The IEP is reviewed at least annually and a re-evaluation data review occurs at least every three years.

Confidentiality: In accordance with 160-4-7-.08, Brighten Academy will continue to protect the confidentiality of every student by providing safeguards to records and information. Brighten Academy has established a policy related to student records (Appendix 1: H14) which addresses custody of records and ensures safeguards are in place to ensure confidentiality. Only professional staff have access to special education records. Each year, certified staff are provided with professional development related to protecting the confidentiality of students. Professional staff reviews all records in their immediate keeping to assure that only responsible and documented information is maintained, removing as necessary extraneous or inappropriate information. The person in professional status responsible for maintaining records is responsible for administering the use of the file in observance of due process, confidentiality, and guarantees that records contain factual, documented information on students.

Discipline: In accordance with IDEA, 160-4-7-.1 0, and Brighten's student discipline policies (Appendix 1: H24, H26, H26 R-1) the school will continue to provide students exhibiting behaviors inconsistent with the school's discipline policy with redirection, relevant consequence, and instruction on appropriate behaviors. In cases where behaviors require intervention beyond this, the school ensures it follows mandates set forth in IDEA and 160-4-7-.1 0. In keeping with these mandates, school personnel considers, on a case-by-case basis, any unique circumstances when determining whether a change in placement is appropriate for a child with a disability who violates the school's Code of Conduct. Students are removed from their current placement to an appropriate alternative setting or suspension for no more than 10 consecutive school days. For disciplinary action to exceed 10 days, a manifestation determination is made within 10 days of any placement decision. Behaviors not manifested by the disability are addressed in accordance with the prescribed Brighten discipline policy and follow the same manner and

duration as the procedures applied to children without disabilities. If the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the disability, the IEP committee reviews the IEP & behavioral intervention plan (BIP) to appropriately address the behavior.. If the student does not have a behavior intervention plan, the IEP committee reviews the IEP and seeks parental consent for a functional behavior assessment (FBA). Students removed from their educational setting, according to law, receive educational services that enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum or receive other instruction or services as provided for in the student's IEP. If removal of a student is a change of placement, the student's IEP team determines appropriate services. In certain circumstances where a student carries or possesses a weapon on school premises or to a school function, knowingly possesses or uses or sells illegal drugs or controlled substances on school premises or at a school function, or has inflicted serious bodily harm to another person on school premises or at a school function, Brighten Academy administration may elect to remove the student to an interim alternative educational setting for no more than 45 school days without regard to whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability, pursuant to special education federal and state laws. Parents are afforded an opportunity to appeal, following due process, any decisions related to placement.

Facility: Pursuant to Section 504 accessibility requirements and 160-4-7-.14 Brighten provides a classroom of suitable size in a distraction-free area, as required by the type of program or services to be established, with appropriate furniture, materials, supplies and equipment to meet the needs of the class or individual children to be served. Brighten's facility addresses all components of ADA provisions for students with disabilities including appropriately accessible door knobs, hard-ware, and handicap buttons, Braille signage, grab bars in bathrooms, handicap accessible stalls, hallways and doorways compliant with wheelchair accessibility, sinks and automatic hand dryers, accessible water fountains, accessible curb cuts, ramps, and an elevator.

Assurances

Brighten Academy hereby provides the following assurances:

1. Brighten Academy or the Douglas County School System (as provided by law) will provide appropriately licensed/certified personnel for all students with disabilities.
2. Brighten Academy will implement the same identification, evaluation, placement, reporting, and due process procedures and use the same or equivalent special education forms as other schools in the System and provide copies of all IEPs to the School System.
3. Brighten Academy will submit to program review by state and local officials to the same extent required of other schools in the System.
4. All Brighten Academy teachers will be required to participate in workshops, in-service programs, and/or training offered by the Special Education Department to the same extent required of other teachers in the System.
5. Students identified with disabilities who require more intensive services other than interrelated will be served according to the IEP at the appropriate school within the Douglas County School System.
6. Discipline issues regarding special education students will be handled in accordance with state rules and federal regulations.

Intermittent Home Services and Homebound Services

Brighten Academy recognizes its responsibility to provide a public education program for students who have a medically diagnosed condition that may result in frequent, intermittent absences that may significantly impact their academic performance. Once a medical diagnosis is determined, the parent, teachers, and administration work collaboratively to develop an educational plan that meets the needs of the student. To be eligible for intermittent home services, a medical form with a specific diagnosis must be completed and signed by a licensed physician and submitted to the school. A Homebound Committee is then convened to review the medical documentation and educational impact. Instruction is provided as

determined by the Homebound Committee and may be offered in a variety of settings. Homebound services are determined and provided by Brighten Academy.

Question 6

Describe how the charter school provides state-and federally-mandated services for English Learners (ELs).

English as a Second Language Program (ESOL/ELL)

Brighten Academy is committed to meeting each child’s individual educational needs; therefore, the school implements an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program to provide additional assistance for limited English proficiency speakers. Through the ESOL/ELL program, students with limited English proficiency acquire skills in verbal and written English language through “structured immersion” in the classroom, with additional support provided as needed to assist students in becoming proficient. Brighten Academy creates its curriculum around the WIDA ELP Standards which are aligned to Georgia’s Performance Standards for language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The overarching WIDA standards indicate that English language learners will be able to communicate in English for social and instructional purposes within the school setting, as well as communicate information of ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. These ELP standards serve as the anchor for assessment, curriculum, and instruction. Brighten Academy employs certified and ESOL-endorsed teachers across grade levels to provide services and support to ELLs. Teachers with ELL students use WIDA Can Do Descriptors to ensure equitable access to developmentally appropriate content and to help differentiate instruction and assessment as students move along the continuum of language development. All Brighten Academy instructional staff participate in monthly professional development to support English Learners. Brighten Academy ESOL teacher(s) participate in additional monthly professional learning presented by the Douglas County School System ESOL Specialist. In collaboration with the Douglas County School System, Brighten Academy offers Parent Outreach/Engagement opportunities for the parents of ELLs.

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Brighten Academy, in compliance with Federal, State, and Douglas County laws and regulations, screens students new to U.S. schools, including upcoming kindergarten students, who are potential ELLs based on their parents' responses on the original Home Language Survey (HLS) given to them in a language and format they understand. Brighten Academy utilizes the grade-level appropriate WIDA screener, following WIDA guidelines and instructions. In addition, Brighten Academy utilizes the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs Test to determine continued eligibility for the ESOL program. Brighten Academy follows all state and federal policies, rules, and regulations throughout the charter term related to the identification, placement, service delivery, and exiting of students in the ESOL program.

Brighten's ELL population has grown by 87% since the 2017-2018 school year, and the school has subsequently increased staff and resources to meet these needs. ELL students at Brighten Academy are served through Georgia Department of Education-approved delivery models. The majority of ELL students are served through the Resource Center/Lab model where they receive language assistance in a group setting supplemented by multimedia materials. As appropriate, ELL students may be served through an innovative delivery model in which they receive services from their ESOL Certified or Endorsed content teacher with the close support of the school's ESOL Teacher Mentor. Some ELL students who also receive special education services are served on a consultative basis. The special education case manager and ESOL teacher hold regularly-scheduled consultative meetings to discuss appropriate adaptations and accommodations of the language demands of instructional content and tasks, as well as student progress as related to language acquisition. Brighten Academy convenes an EL Reclassification Team to complete an EL Reclassification Form on all students who meet the standardized, statewide criteria for English proficiency and no longer meet the definition of an English learner. The academic progress of post-exited EL students is monitored for two calendar years to ensure that they have not been exited prematurely and that they are able to meaningfully participate in standards-based instruction and assessment comparable to their never-EL peers.

Question 7

Provide the number and percentage of students receiving In-School Suspensions, Out-of-School Suspensions, or Expulsions during the current charter term. How does this discipline and dismissal data compare to the Office of Civil Rights data?

The cornerstone of Brighten’s success is a pervasive and comprehensive school culture that supports the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral success of all students. Brighten has continued to grow in its effectiveness of establishing and managing a balanced discipline plan. Instructional staff review disaggregated instructional and discipline data throughout each year to determine discrepancies in consistent application of discipline and teaching policies and practices across all student populations and grade levels. Brighten Academy strongly believes that behaviors are closely tied to meeting students’ academic needs and vice versa. Further, the school supports the philosophy that explicitly teaching social and emotional skills is just as important as teaching academic skills. Brighten’s Crew model provides for direct instruction on many communication and self regulation skills that enhance school culture and academic performance.

Despite enrollment growth in the present charter term and a shift in demographics, the school has been able to maintain a positive school climate, including managing discipline and a safe learning environment, as measured by a CCRPI School Climate score of 90 or higher throughout the charter term, as well as evidenced by student surveys, sustained enrollment and wait lists, and other anecdotal indicators.

Brighten has never been added to the state school unsafe school list. Further, in the full charter term, students’ behavioral needs have been supported within the school, and only one student needed placement in an alternative setting outside of Brighten Academy. According to the CCRPI School Climate discipline domains, Brighten Academy remains above 90% in both student discipline and safe and substance-free learning environment as noted in the data below:

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Weighted Suspension Rate / Student Discipline Score	95.8%	95.6%	95.3%	No data
Safe and Substance Free Learning Environment	90.8%	90.5%	91.5%	No data

While the data above is encouraging, upon closer examination of subgroup data, the school recognizes that the discipline data from the Office of Civil Rights reported an overrepresentation of suspension events with Black/African American students, which is a majority of the student population. Recognizing this trend in 2018, the school began to collect data and implement equity-based practices to address the disparity. Brighten’s partner in curriculum design, EL Education, provided a professional development course entitled Management in the Active Classroom to train staff in best practices related to techniques and protocols that build self-discipline, responsibility, engagement, and leadership skills in students. In 2019, Brighten began school-wide training in social identity, cultural awareness, implicit bias, and restorative practices. Discipline data collected through the 2019-2020 school year shows a noticeable improvement in total number of suspension events, as well as a reduction of out-of-school suspensions for black students by over 60%. Brighten Academy values student engagement in their learning, and some small changes to the discipline structure in 2019 allows the school to hold students accountable in different ways in order to keep them in school. A shift towards more in-school suspension with reflection and restorative practices retains student access to education and improves overall school climate.

When reviewing discipline data through the lens of ethnicity/race, Black /African American students retain a disproportionate share of the discipline events. It is clear that staff development on implicit bias and restorative practices must continue, following its abrupt interruption in March 2020.

2020-2021	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions	
Ethnicity/Race	Number & Percentage of Total Population					
Latino Hispanic	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
American Indian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black/African American	1	0.12%	1	0.12%	0	0%
White	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Two or More Races	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total Population	832					

2019-2020	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions	
Ethnicity/Race	Number & Percentage of Total Population					
Latino Hispanic	1	0.12%	1	0.12%	0	0%
American Indian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black/African American	18	2.08%	9	1.04%	0	0%
White	1	0.12%	1	0.12%	0	0%
Two or More Races	0	0%	1	0.12%	0	0%
Total Population	867					

2018-2019	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions	
Ethnicity/Race	Number & Percentage of Total Population					
Latino Hispanic	3	0.36%	1	0.12%	0	0%
American Indian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black/African American	21	2.51%	23	2.75%	0	0%
White	3	0.36%	2	0.24%	0	0%
Two or More Races	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total Population	836					

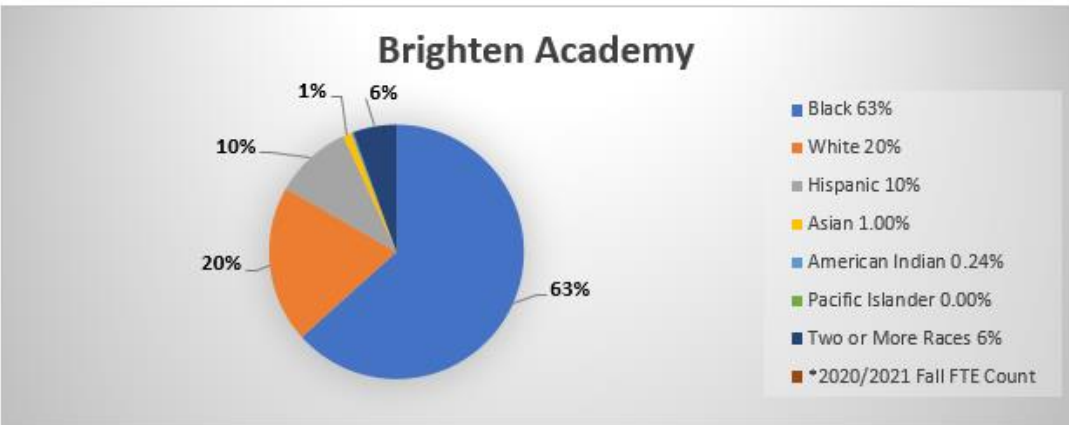
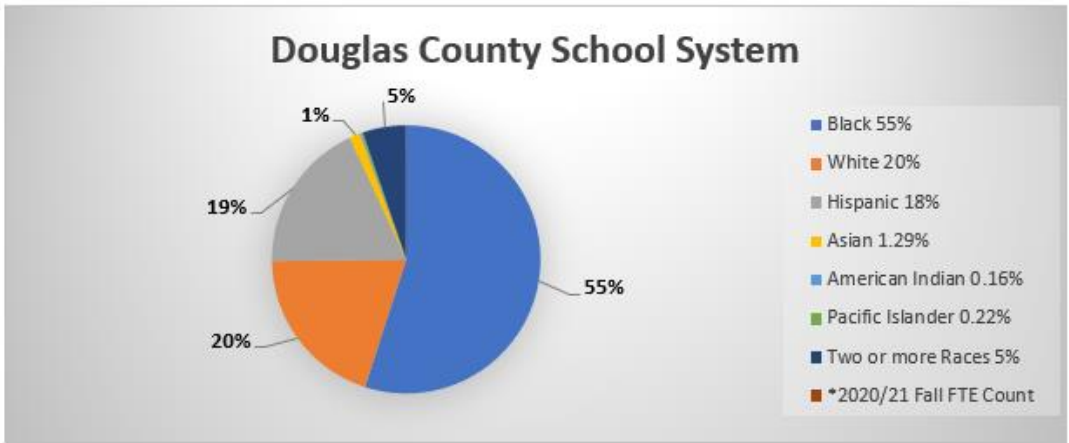
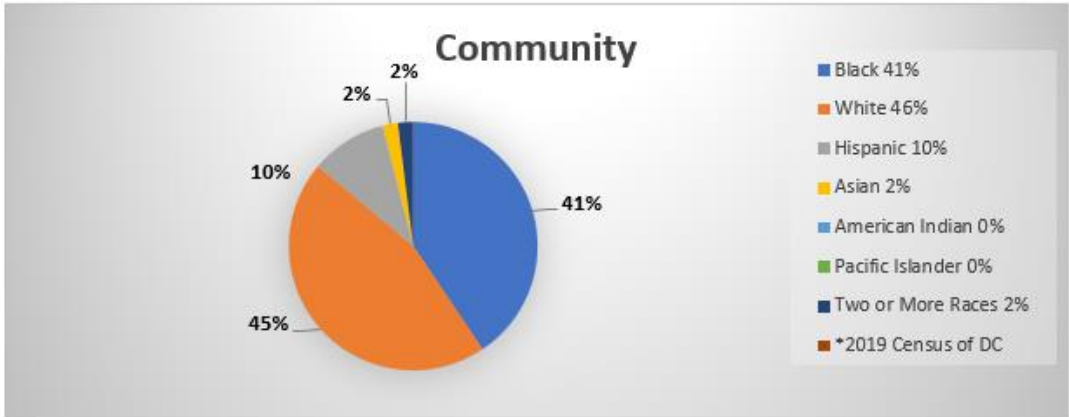
2017-2018	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions	
Ethnicity/Race	Number & Percentage of Total Population					
Latino Hispanic	0	0%	2	0.25%	0	0%
American Indian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black/African American	12	1.49%	21	2.61%	1	0.12%
White	0	0%	3	0.37%	0	0%
Two or More Races	0	0%	1	0.12%	0	0%
Total Population	805					

2016-2017	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions		Expulsions	
Ethnicity/Race	Number & Percentage of Total Population					
Latino Hispanic	0	0%	1	0.13%	0	0%
American Indian	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black/African American	16	2.05%	14	1.80%	0	0%
White	1	0.13%	0	0%	0	0%
Two or More Races	0	0%	1	0.13%	0	0%
Total Population	779					

Question 8

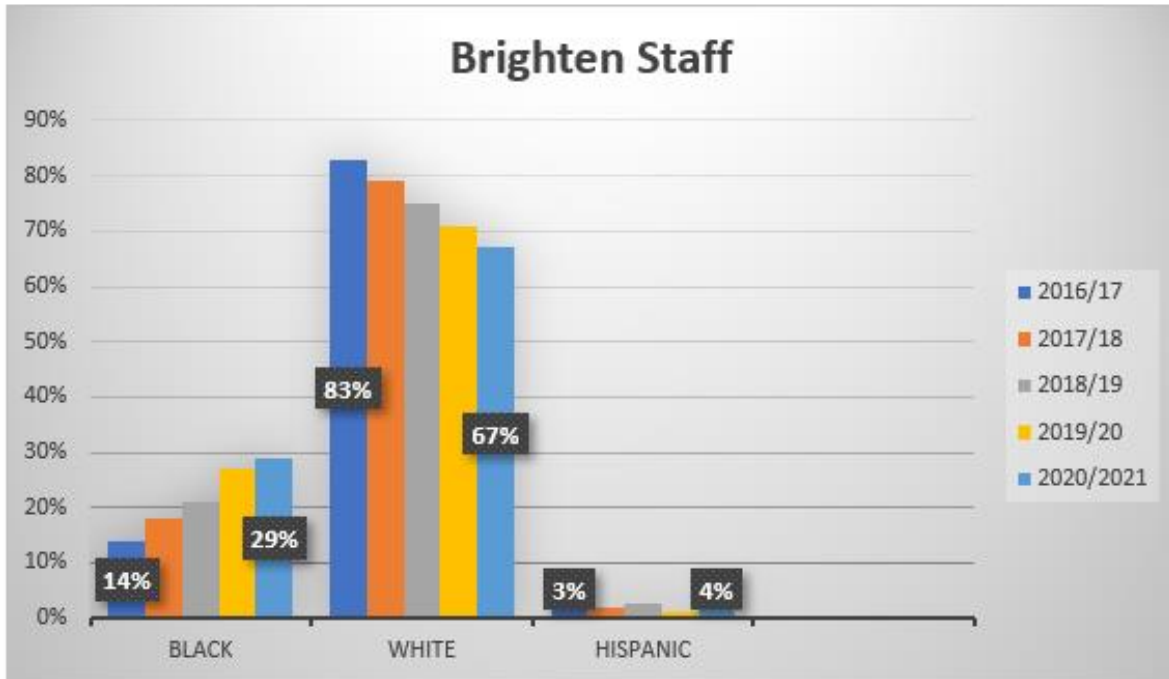
Describe in detail how the charter school’s students, governing board, faculty, and staff reflect the sociodemographic diversity of the community served by the charter school.

The school hopes to continue to serve a student body whose demographics are representative of the Douglas County community. Brighten’s current demographics mirror the county’s demographics as reported in the most recent Census Bureau report with respect to ethnicity. Brighten’s ethnicity is balanced among the two majority ethnicities served in the Douglas County School System.



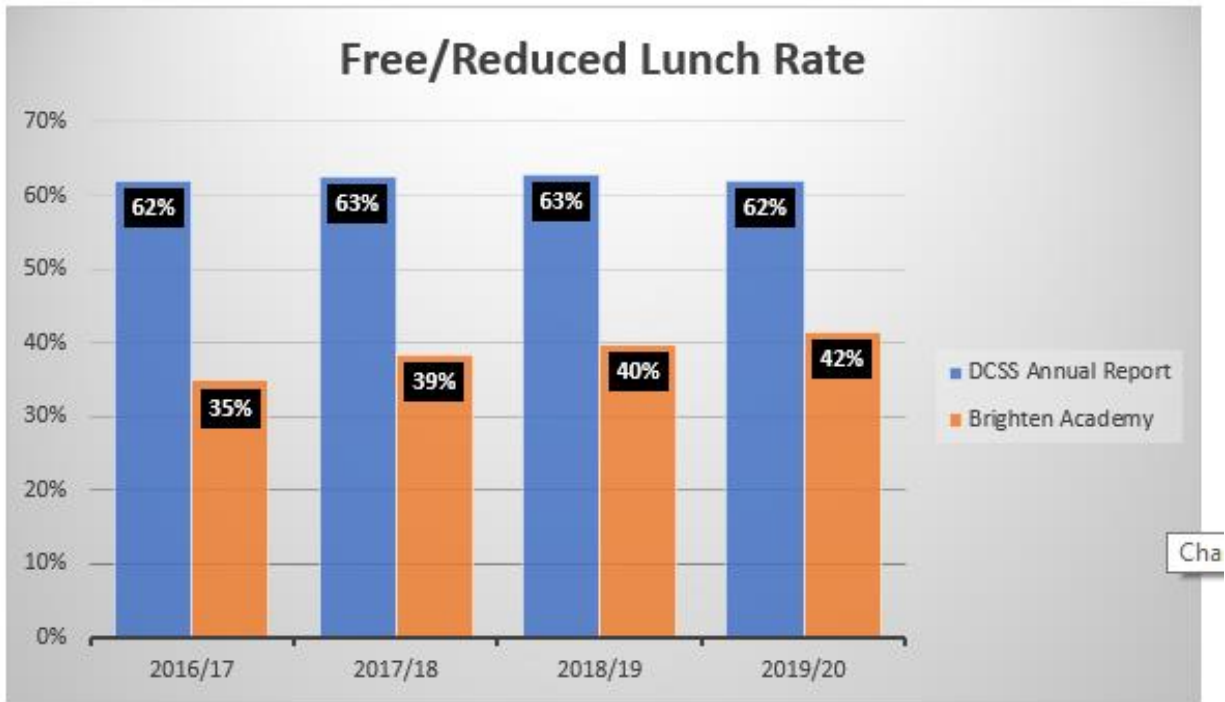
Brighten Academy Charter School

The school hopes to continue to also have a staff whose demographics are representative of the Douglas County community. Brighten efforts to market a diverse staff have been very successful, and the school will endeavor to continue with these efforts.



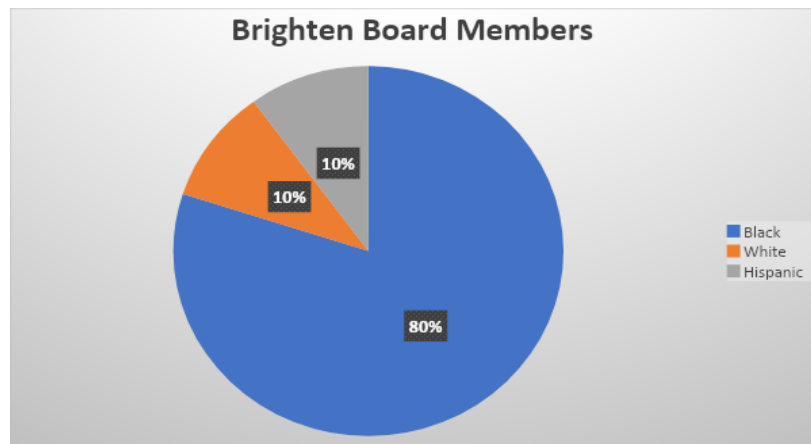
The school's population of socio-economically diverse students compared to the entire district is lower. However, Brighten's efforts to market to a diverse population of students have been successful & each

year the school has served a higher population of socio-economically diverse students.



Supplemental Information:

Brighten began tracking the demographics of its board members starting with the 2020-2021 school year. Although Brighten’s ethnicity does show a higher demographic amongst Black/African American, it does favorably fall in line with the Hispanic population of the school and the community. The school will look into mirroring the demographics that are representative of the Douglas County community.



Question 9

Describe in detail any difficulties faced during the charter term that were not already addressed above, how the school dealt with such difficulties, and if they remain an issue for the school. Also explain how the school plans to avoid these difficulties during the upcoming charter renewal term.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic school closure, Brighten Academy made an immediate shift to online learning for all students. Digital learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Seesaw were adopted, and students received live whole group and differentiated small group instruction via video conference. Instruction was recorded and made available asynchronously for students who could not attend live classes. In addition, the special education department developed COVID-19 Distance Learning Plans to ensure all students with disabilities had access to instruction and special education supports and services during distance learning. Case managers consulted with parents, relevant teachers, and service providers to develop these plans. For the 2020-2021 school year, the school followed the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE), and Georgia Department of Health (DPH) to ensure the reopening of the school building prioritized the health and safety of staff and students.

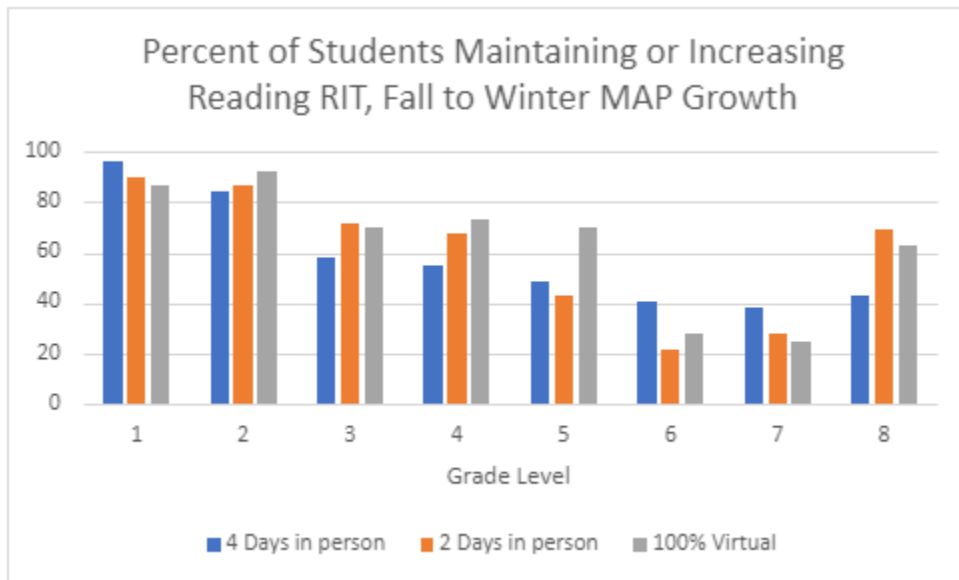
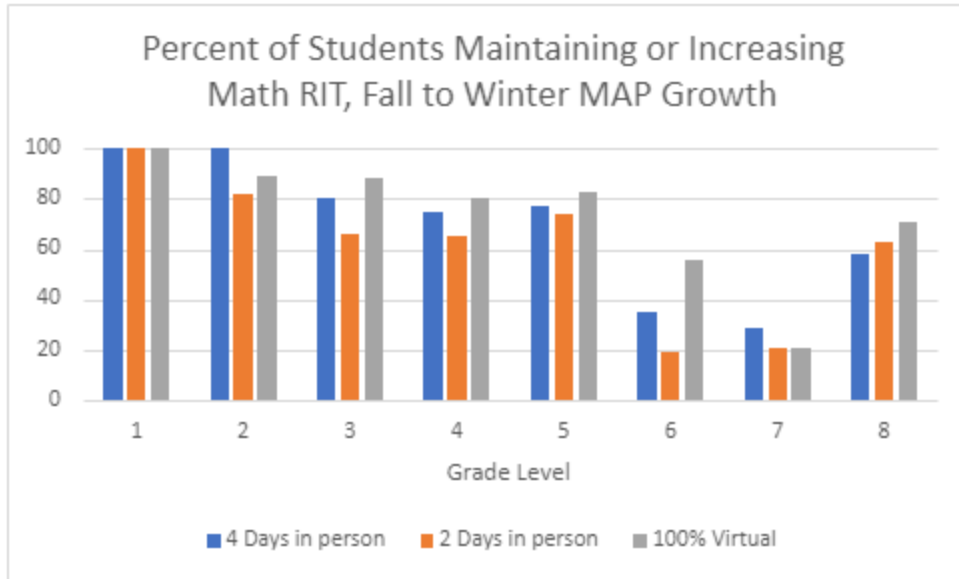
Additionally, special education case managers reviewed each student's progress during the school closure to determine if services were adequate to ensure progress on IEP goals. If the culmination of data indicated that COVID Impact Services were warranted, the student was recommended to receive these services as outlined by the LEA.

In an effort to remove barriers to students' ability to access instructional materials from school and home, BACS offered to provide an individual learning device (Chromebook or laptop) for each student and teacher at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic school closure. Technology consultants also personally supported teachers in reconfiguring home networks and increasing more stable internet connectivity, and

the instructional staff was provided with a stipend to offset additional cell phone and internet costs incurred from teaching at home.

As students and staff returned to the school building, the technology infrastructure was not adequate enough to support students doing online work while teachers used video conferencing to instruct virtual students. Brighten addressed this issue by reconfiguring the network and increasing the bandwidth to not only resolve the current issues but also allow for future expansion should it become necessary.

Despite the extreme challenges shared by all public schools in this unprecedented pandemic year, Brighten students showed continued growth in academic achievement. Upon review of NWEA MAP Assessment data for the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year, the school determined that at least 50% of students in grades 1-5, as well as 8th grade, maintained or increased their RIT scores (which measures growth and achievement) in both math and reading. Overall, 79% of students maintained or increased RIT scores in math and 69% of students maintained or increased RIT scores in reading. Further analysis of the data indicates that students who attended 4 days in-person or who were 100% virtual outperformed those who chose the hybrid model (2 days in person). This will factor into decision-making regarding scheduling and future delivery models.



PROPOSED CHANGES

Question 10

A – Academic Changes

Though the COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges for the school, it also spurred research and discussion to ensure students continue to receive effective and rigorous instruction, regardless of the modality. Experience with digital learning provided a better understanding of the benefits of instructional technology that the school will continue to utilize. Considerations are being made to revise or improve the special education curriculum to meet the needs of learners, and Brighten is exploring a more robust social and emotional learning curriculum in response to achievement gaps and discipline data. Brighten plans to continue to follow the Georgia Standards of Excellence and utilize Eureka Math (K-8), EL modules (K-8) and Skills Block (K-2) as its general education curriculum. Within five years, Brighten will partner with other Georgia EL schools to modify the EL modules to align with local science and social studies standards. Brighten Academy will continue to utilize data from the NWEA MAP Assessment to monitor students' growth. In response to recent gaps noted in achievement, Brighten plans to add additional enrichment groups as appropriate, as well as resource electives for gifted students.

Brighten has grown and matured substantially in the prior three charter terms. The school has adopted innovative academic, operational, and financial strategies through the years that have helped achieve charter goals and objectives. A notable area for future growth is in the school's leadership capacity. Over the past charter term, Brighten Academy has explored leadership structures in other successful charter schools to determine a structure that would best align with the school's needs. In the upcoming charter term, with adequate funding now in place, Brighten seeks to restructure the leadership team to include a superintendent, a school principal, an elementary vice principal, and a middle school vice principal. Furthermore, the school seeks to develop career ladders for teachers that will leverage their strengths and continue to aid in succession planning for the future.

B – Governance Changes

Opportunities to enhance the governance structure for the upcoming charter term have been identified in three areas: composition, ethnic and racial diversity, and skillset.

Historically, Brighten has had a board consisting of a majority of parents with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Although these parents are very vested because of their affiliation with the school through their own children, other challenges frequently arise such as potential conflicts of interest. In the upcoming charter term, the intent is to broaden the board pool outside of the parent population and to attract candidates within the Douglas County community and beyond who can bring expertise, diversity, experience, and objectivity to the board. Some sources of candidates may include former Brighten Academy parents, future charter school leaders, Leadership Douglas cohort members, a diversity group within the Douglas County Chamber of Commerce, a representative from the Women of Douglasville Facebook Group, and organizations that have board/community service opportunities for their employees. Brighten will develop parent advisement and governance committee opportunities for parents to remain an integral voice in governance decisions.

Current demographics of the district indicate that Douglas County has a population of 10% of residents with Latinx origins and 8.5% who are Spanish speakers. Because projections indicate the Hispanic population will continue to grow, Brighten plans to increase recruitment of candidates who are Spanish-speaking and/or of Hispanic ethnicity to ensure this population continues to be appropriately represented.

Over the last charter term, both the school and community demographics have changed in every area including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and programming eligibility. These changes have required adjustments to the strategic plan objectives and school improvement plan goals to ensure that the needs of

the student and parent community are met. Brighten Academy has continued to diversify its staff and remains committed to maintaining a diverse board that reflects the student population and community. Furthermore, the school will seek board member candidates who are innovative and skilled in strategic planning, resource development, and communications/marketing to align with strategic objectives for the next five-year period. Brighten plans to also recruit for a qualified treasurer as well as a representative with legal expertise. Currently, Brighten’s board is composed of many “big idea” people who are visionaries. Although this is a critical part of any board, the school also recognizes the need to recruit some tactical members who will engage in the task-related responsibilities that are a part of an active, working board.

C – Financial Changes

Due to its continued success, Brighten Academy proposes to maintain its current structures and practices related to its CFO, financial practices, and vendor/contractor management.

D – Operational Changes

Due to Brighten’s operational successes that resulted in school demographics that both represent the community and align with the school’s mission, there are no proposed changes related to recruitment, enrollment, grades served, contracted services or attendance zones. Brighten anticipates the need to add additional performing arts space to increase programming within the next charter term. Details about this plan are included in the next section, *Looking to the Future*.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Question 11

Describe how the school has and will continue with its proposed changes to serve the needs of its students for the upcoming (renewed) charter term.

A - Academics

In the current charter term, Brighten has achieved the status of an EL-Credentialed School and has become a National Mentor School, mentoring other schools as they implement the EL model in their schools and deepen their practices. In the upcoming charter term, the school plans to develop an EL project to specifically be used as an exemplar across the EL network.

Brighten's community service projects have continually developed over the last five years to become more academically rigorous and impactful for every grade level. The school is now ready to expand community service projects in order to promote student-led community service opportunities. Students have begun to initiate service projects over the last few years and this practice will continue to become more prevalent across the school. Just as students have adopted a "leaders of their own learning" mindset academically, they will likewise begin to develop a more socially-conscious mindset, as well.

Brighten Academy is invested in understanding issues related to equity and addresses these issues through board and staff training, intentional cultural activities in both student and adult Crews, targeted selection, implementation, and disbursement of resources and curriculum to meet the needs of all learners and families. As part of this commitment, the school will focus on the Responsive Classroom and Restorative Justice so that equity is pervasive in all areas of the school.

B - Governance

Brighten has grown and matured substantially in the prior three charter terms. The school has adopted innovative academic, operational, and financial strategies through the years that have helped attain charter goals and objectives. As stated earlier, Brighten Academy endeavors to implement a new leadership structure to include a superintendent, a school principal, an elementary vice principal, and a middle school vice principal.

The board's role in this restructuring endeavor will include overseeing a transition period where qualified interns will work under current leaders to build their skills and competencies and to transfer institutional knowledge over a three-year period. The board will also work to develop an evaluation tool aligned with job responsibilities newly developed for the superintendent role. Furthermore, the board will ensure that adequate professional development opportunities are provided to ensure the superintendent continues to grow as a professional. For future implementation of the new structure, Brighten will develop a leadership pipeline to sustain high-quality, diverse educators and create a succession plan for current leadership and governance.

The superintendent will be the board liaison, assisting in contributing to the development and implementation of the strategic plan; will support policy in practice, resource development, community outreach; and will ensure legal and regulatory compliance. In addition, the superintendent will oversee the performance of the principal and Chief Financial Officer and will ensure charter goals are met.

The board will continue to work in partnership with the local school district and support the district in meeting its long term goals and objectives. The school plans to continue to leverage the expertise of the local district board, specifically in oversight of a superintendent as it transitions to the new administrative structure. The Brighten board will continue outreach to local and state authorities and community agencies and organizations to build upon resources and collective expertise in effective governance.

Brighten intends to initiate a Charter Advisory Board as a standing subcommittee of the Governing Board. The committee will serve in an advising capacity on matters that directly concern school programming and fundraising efforts. The Advisory Board will be composed of members with diverse skills and experiences to provide the board and management with objective opinions about the organization and provide input, skills, and knowledge towards specific projects or strategic initiatives. The scope of the Advisory Board may include the following: identify fundraising, technical assistance and marketing resources, assess the impact of programs, projects and events, serve as ad hoc on short-term events, and serve as a non-political advocate for the school.

C - Financial

Brighten's effective financial stewardship has enabled the school to be in a position to think more strategically about financial goals in the upcoming charter term. The school plans to reduce debt by paying off the previous facility at Brookmont and preparing it for short sale as well as developing a comprehensive capital campaign strategy to increase donations. With the new administrative structure, the superintendent will be in a position to develop a partners-in-education base, which will support capital campaign endeavors. Brighten will refinance the current building bond to obtain a more reasonable rate and will continue to advocate for facility support through QBE earnings.

D - Operational

With the newest strategic plan objectives established, there are several operational aspirations for the coming charter term. Parent and student feedback indicates a desire to expand elective programming to include more STEM-related choices, as well as to increase fine arts offerings. In keeping with these efforts, the school will apply for STEM certification, as well as either build or create a partnership for a fine arts/multi-purpose classroom facility.

Brighten's experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the positive impacts of differentiation, small class size, and creative models for instruction. Consequently, the school plans to work on increasing teacher supports, reducing student:teacher ratios, and exploring innovative schedules and learning models. Schedules such as looping, multi-age groupings, extended day for remediation and/or enrichment, and intercessions are being explored. Brighten is also considering an instructional model that includes a virtual component for targeted populations for academic, social, behavioral, or other related purposes. This virtual component would honor the school's culture and commitment to the Crew spirit focused on developing effective learners and ethical people. Committees composed of board, staff, parents, and students will help develop needs analyses, feasibility studies, and implementation plans related to any staffing, scheduling, or school model revisions.

Brighten plans to continue to ensure voices of stakeholders are a key part of decision making. For the upcoming charter term, the school will focus on elevating the voices of students and parents. This includes a plan to increase extracurricular offerings to focus on student leadership through clubs such as a Student Government Association as well establishing a parent Crew that aligns with the student Crew structure with a focus on continued improvement in school climate in areas such as discipline, attendance rates, and parental involvement.

A committee of founders, board, staff, parents, and students has been created as part of a rebranding initiative that will create a logo and comprehensive public relations and marketing plan that aligns with Brighten's financial goals. The new image will be used to leverage social media presence, elevate Brighten's presence in the charter community, attract funders and organizational partnerships, and sustain demand in enrollment.

APPENDIX

1. Board Policy Manual

http://baboard.weebly.com/uploads/7/7/7/8/7778446/11_30_20_updates.pdf

2. Decision Making Matrix

<https://brightenacademy2->

[my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/lmcdonald_brightenacademy_com/EazNM3SE2otFsqrFYPC](https://brightenacademy2-my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/lmcdonald_brightenacademy_com/EazNM3SE2otFsqrFYPC)

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