

Ascend Learning

Project Narrative

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I. INTRODUCTION

The first Ascend school opened in 2008 with 210 students in grades K-2 in Brownsville, Brooklyn and since then, we have successfully been replicating and expanding high-quality charter schools. Today in Brownsville—where fewer than 20 percent of adults hold college degrees—and in neighboring communities in Central Brooklyn, Ascend operates five college-preparatory public charter schools with nine lower, middle, and high school campuses, serving 3,962 students. Ascend students have shown notable growth in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math on state tests over the last three years. They have also consistently and significantly surpassed peers from their host districts in ELA and math proficiency, and last school year (2015-2016) Ascend students also outperformed students in both New York City and New York State in both ELA and math.

At the heart of our CSP funding request is the belief that children and their families in economically and educationally underserved communities deserve access to high-performing, intellectually vibrant, and emotionally supportive schools that equip students with the knowledge, confidence, and character to succeed in college and beyond. With CSP funding, Ascend seeks to expand its high-quality charter network to serve twice as many students as today in economically disadvantaged communities of Brooklyn, New York.

II. ABSOLUTE PRIORITIES

Absolute Priority 1—Low-Income Demographic

In the 2016-17 school year, Ascend schools serve 3,962 students and their families in Central Brooklyn. **Eighty-three percent of these students are from low-income families, as determined by qualification for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL).** See Appendix E: Schools Operated by Applicant, for a description of the five charter schools currently operated

by Ascend, and Appendix I: Additional Information for detailed demographic information about our students.

III. COMPETITIVE PRIORITIES

Competitive Preference Priority 1—Promoting Diversity

Ascend is not applying under this competitive preference priority.

Competitive Preference Priority 2—School Improvement through Turnaround Efforts.

Ascend is not applying under this competitive preference priority.

Competitive Preference 3—Novice Applicant

Ascend is applying under this competitive preference priority. Ascend is a novice applicant as our charter management organization (CMO) and schools have never received a Replication and Expansion grant or been a member of a group application that received one. Ascend has also not had an active discretionary grant from the Federal government in the five years before the deadline date for applications for new awards under this Replication and Expansion grant competition.

IV. INVITATIONAL PRIORITY: RIGOROUS EVALUATION

Associate Professor Martin West of Harvard University will lead an independent, lottery-based (i.e., randomized-control trial) evaluation of the Ascend model designed (1) to assess the attainment of the grant objectives, and (2) to generate evidence for the field on the extent to which Ascend’s innovative liberal arts academic program and supportive cultural model support student success in school and beyond. Ascend has established an ambitious set of objectives with respect to enrollment growth, academic and non-cognitive student outcomes, and financial sustainability. In addition to tracking the organization’s progress toward achieving these objectives, the evaluation will seek to understand Ascend’s impact on its students relative to the

schools they would otherwise attend. The approach, described in detail in Selection Criteria C—Quality of the Evaluation Plan for the Proposed Project, is consistent with methods employed in previous studies of charter schools that have met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards “without reservations.”

V. SELECTION CRITERIA

Founded in 2008 by Steven Wilson, a longtime education reformer and lead author of the Massachusetts Charter School law, Ascend Learning (Ascend) is a growing Charter Management Organization overseeing nine school campuses—five lower school campuses, three middle school campuses, and one high school campus—under five K-12 charters in Brooklyn, New York. In the current school year, 2016-2017, 83 percent of Ascend students are eligible for FRPL, 73 percent are African-American, and 22 percent are Hispanic.

Ascend’s mission is to develop a scalable solution to the underachievement of economically disadvantaged children—a network of urban, college-preparatory, K-12 charter schools, operating with widely available human and financial resources, and posting achievement levels equal or superior to schools educating students from middle-class families. The mission of every Ascend school is to equip our students with the knowledge, confidence, and character to succeed in college and beyond. By offering a rich liberal arts education in a supportive environment, we animate children’s natural sense of curiosity and prepare students to think on their own, thrive on their own, and engage the world as informed, responsible citizens.

Several years ago, Ascend made a decision to move away from a punitive approach to discipline and towards a more positive, supportive cultural model in order to foster the critical thinking and independence of thought we aim to cultivate in our students. Ascend schools adopted a cultural model rooted in Responsive Classroom and restorative practices that builds

our students’ sense of agency and purpose. We nurture their innate capacity to understand the impact of their actions and desire to make the right choices.

Ascend is deeply committed to operating truly public schools. We believe that all students deserve a college-preparatory education and welcome students regardless of special needs or English language learner status. We also fill every available seat through ninth grade. Every Ascend school begins to operate on public funds alone in its third year of operations, with little to no philanthropic support beyond this point, creating a highly sustainable model for replication. Through these essential commitments, Ascend seeks to demonstrate an alternative high-quality public schooling model that can be replicated in communities throughout America.

Ascend currently educates close to 4,000 students in kindergarten through 10th grade in five charter schools with nine campuses. By the fifth and final year of the grant period, 2021-22, Ascend will have doubled in size, enrolling 8,081 students in 10 charter schools with 19 campuses. This growth will result from both expansion and replication: All existing schools will expand by one grade each year through grade 12, and over the grant period the network will open five new middle or high school campuses and five new lower schools (which, after the grant period, will in turn grow to include middle and high schools). The following table reflects Ascend’s planned growth (*and also fulfills Application Requirement (e)(2)*).

Ascend Expansion and Replication Schools, 2017-18 to 2021-2022					
Schools	SY 2017-18	SY 2018-19	SY 2019-20	SY 2020-21	SY 2021-22
Brooklyn Ascend Charter School (currently K-10)	Expansion (grade 11)	Expansion (grade 12)			
Brownsville Ascend Charter School (currently K-8)	Expansion (grade 9)	Replication (grade 10 on new HS campus)	Replication (grade 11)	Replication (grade 12)	

Bushwick Ascend Charter School (currently K-7)	Expansion (grade 8)	Expansion (grade 9)	Replication (grade 10 on new HS campus)	Replication (grade 11)	Replication (grade 12)
Canarsie Ascend Charter School (currently K-4)	Replication (grade 5 on new MS campus)	Replication (grade 6)	Replication (grade 7)	Replication (grade 8)	Replication (grade 9 on new HS campus)
Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School (currently K-3)	Expansion (grade 4)	Replication (grade 5 on new MS campus)	Replication (grade 6)	Replication (grade 7)	Replication (grade 8)
New Ascend Charter School #1	Planning year	Replication (grades K-1 on new LS campus)	Replication (grade 2)	Replication (grade 3)	Replication (grade 4)
New Ascend Charter School #2	Planning year	Replication (grades K-1 on new LS campus)	Replication (grade 2)	Replication (grade 3)	Replication (grade 4)
New Ascend Charter School #3		Planning year	Replication (grades K-1 on new LS campus)	Replication (grade 2)	Replication (grade 3)
New Ascend Charter School #4			Planning year	Replication (grades K-1 on new LS campus)	Replication (grade 2)
New Ascend Charter School #5			Planning year	Replication (grades K-1 on new LS campus)	Replication (grade 2)

VI. SELECTION CRITERIA (A)—QUALITY OF THE APPLICANT

Ascend schools provide an ambitious, standards-aligned liberal arts education in a supportive environment, offering students in educationally underserved communities an education modeled on those of the country's finest schools. Ascend's mission is to close the achievement gap and place all its students firmly on the path to college and professional success and to a life of informed and involved citizenship.

In 2013-2014, New York State transitioned to a challenging new set of Common Core

State Standards and exams. Across the state, proficiency scores plummeted in that first year, and they persist at lower rates than many other states due to the rigor of the tests and the time it takes for instruction to adapt to the new Common Core requirements. In response to this transition, the Ascend network began making incremental curricular and cultural shifts in the 2013-2014 school year, and completely overhauled its educational model for the 2014-2015 school year to better align with the Common Core. Beginning in 2014-2015, Ascend schools implemented a thoroughly revised curricular and cultural model emphasizing inquiry-based learning, cognitively guided instruction in math, and college-style discussion, all designed to foster critical thinking and deep conceptual understanding. Though a wholesale shift away from direct instruction and punitive discipline practices takes time to show effect, **Ascend schools have demonstrated noteworthy improvement in both ELA and math on the New York State Common Core exams over the past three years, with significant growth in the most recent academic year.**

In 2015-2016, ELA and math proficiency rates at Ascend schools outpaced schools in our host districts, New York City, and New York State, and reflect the effective impact of Ascend's revised educational model on addressing the requirements of the Common Core. Our students are now notably better prepared to engage with the relatively new rigorous Common Core standards. Their academic performance on last year's state assessments proves the incremental success of this curricular shift.

In tables and discussion below, and in Appendix G, Ascend student performance over the past three years on the annual New York State assessment is evaluated against the performance of students in Ascend host districts in New York City, in New York State, and among particular subgroups, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, African-American students, and Hispanic students. Please note that we

cannot report graduation data yet for Ascend students because our first high school is in only its second year of operation, serving ninth and tenth grades this school year.

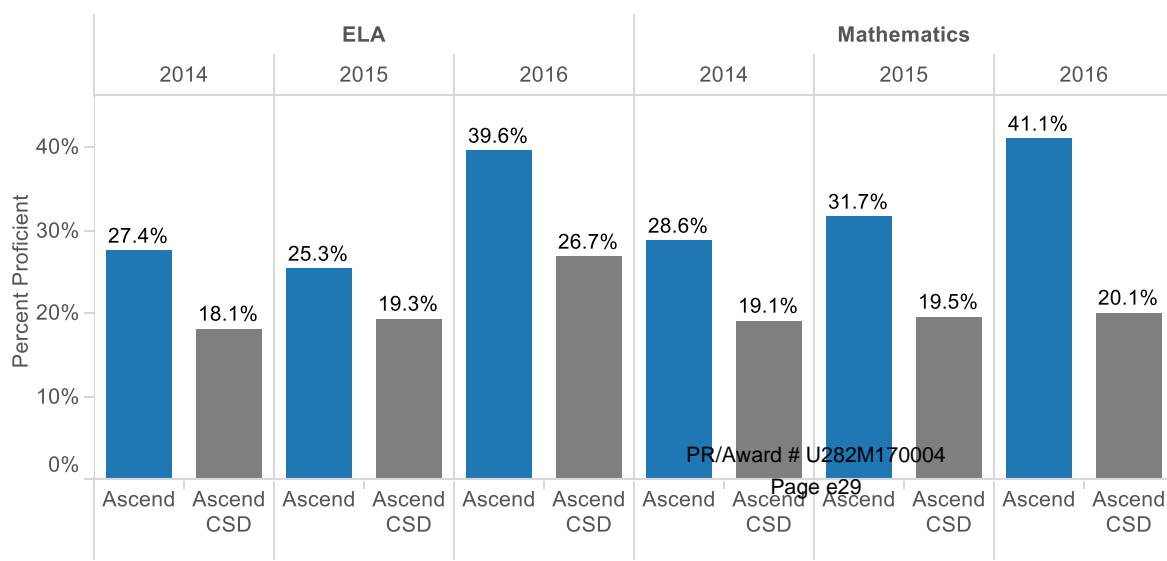
1) ***Demonstrated success in significantly increasing academic achievement for all students and for subgroups of students attending the charter schools the applicant operates or manages (also fulfills Application Requirement (b)(1)).***

In grades three through eight, Ascend students sit for the New York State Common Core tests in ELA and math. In high school, students are assessed through the New York Regents exams, which are gradually being aligned to the Common Core Standards. Ascend enrolled its first ninth-grade class in the 2015-2016 school year and administered Regents exams in June 2016 in Living Environment and Algebra 1, which has been aligned to the Common Core.

For a detailed breakdown of results on the New York State Common Core exams over the past three years, including data disaggregated by subgroup and comparisons to district and state data, see Appendix G: Student Academic Achievement, and the discussion below.

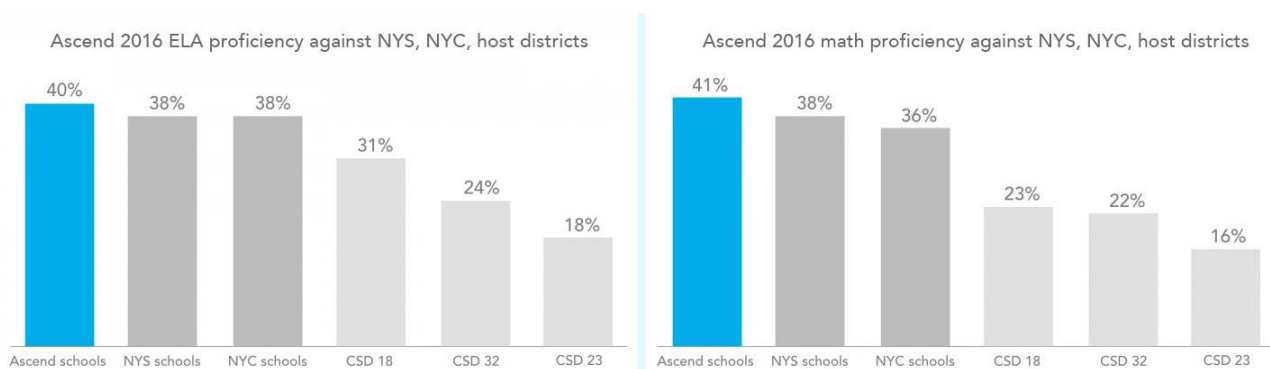
Ascend schools have consistently outperformed their host districts, revealing the power of Ascend’s educational design. Over the last three years, Ascend students have posted average ELA proficiency rates that are an average of 9.4 points higher, and math proficiency rates that are an average of 14.3 points higher, than average scores of students in our host districts.

Average proficiency for Ascend and community school districts (CSD), 2014-2016



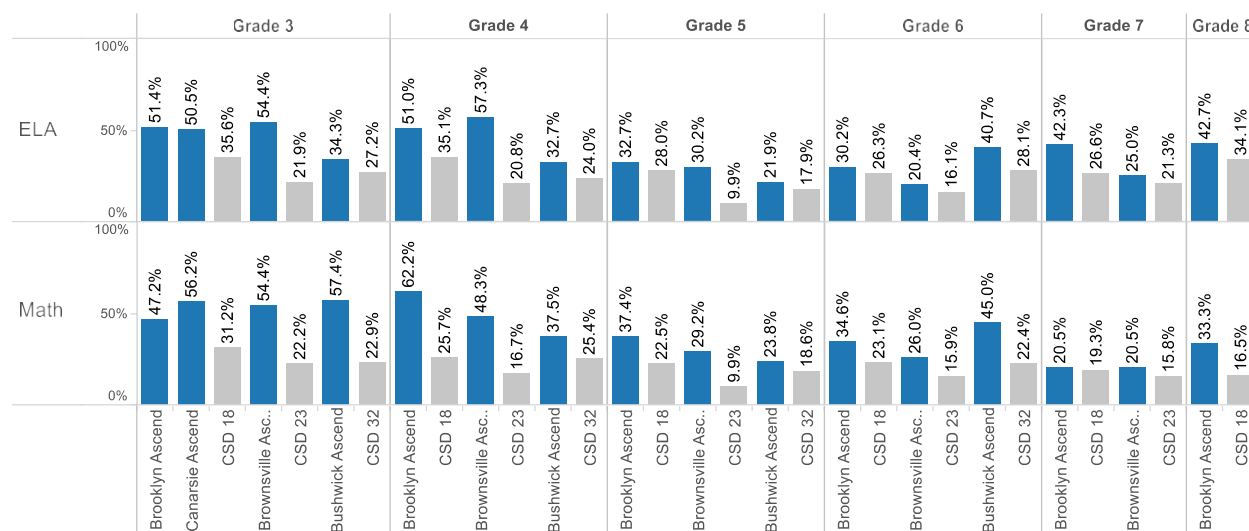
As noted above, the shift to the Common Core drastically reduced proficiency scores across New York State. While most Ascend students have not yet reached proficiency under the new system, performance has significantly improved over the last three years, with the most dramatic growth in school year 2015-2016. In 2016, after two years of ongoing trainings and instructional adaptations by our school staffs to significantly shift their daily practices, our results on the New York State exams demonstrated the power of Ascend’s new rigorous liberal arts curriculum, inquiry-based instruction, and supportive cultural model. In grades three to eight, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in ELA rose to 39.6 in 2016, a gain of 14.3 percentage points, and increased in math to 41.1, a gain of 9.4 points.

Students at Ascend schools made such significant gains last year in both ELA and math that they exceeded the average proficiency not only of students in their host districts, but also the average proficiency of students across *both* New York City and New York State in both ELA and math. Ascend students, who are primarily low-income students of color and live in some of the most socially distressed areas of New York City, are performing at a higher level on average in both ELA and math than groups of their peers at both the city and state levels that include large percentages of students far more advantaged than they. In other words, an Ascend education mitigates, by the measure of the assessment, the deleterious effects of extreme socioeconomic distress on academic achievement.



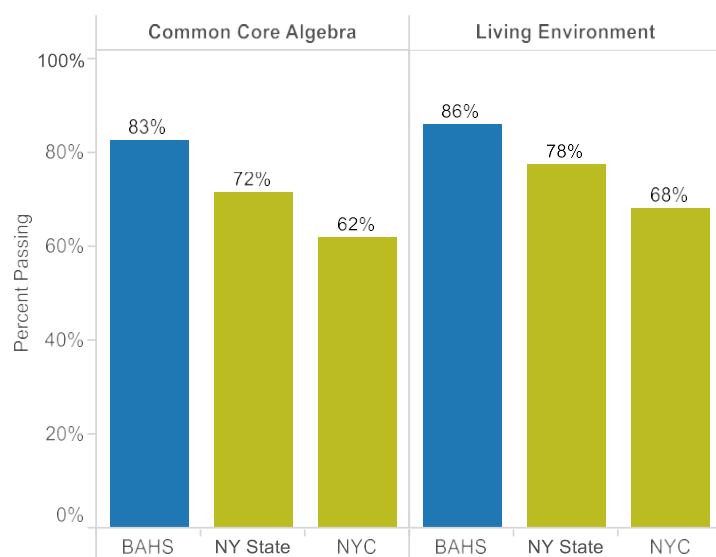
In 2016, Ascend schools not only outperformed their host districts overall, but outperformed their host district schools in *every* school, grade, and subject with an average of 16 percentage points outperformance across all Ascend schools.

Average proficiency by grade for every Ascend school (blue) and host district (grey), 2016



Our first high school campus, Brooklyn Ascend High School (BAHS), had an impressive first year, with 86 percent of ninth-graders passing the Living Environment New York Regents exam and 83 percent passing the new Common Core Algebra Regents exam, surpassing the performance of students in New York City and New York State on both exams.

Percent students passing 2016 Regents exams, Ascend, NYC, and NYS



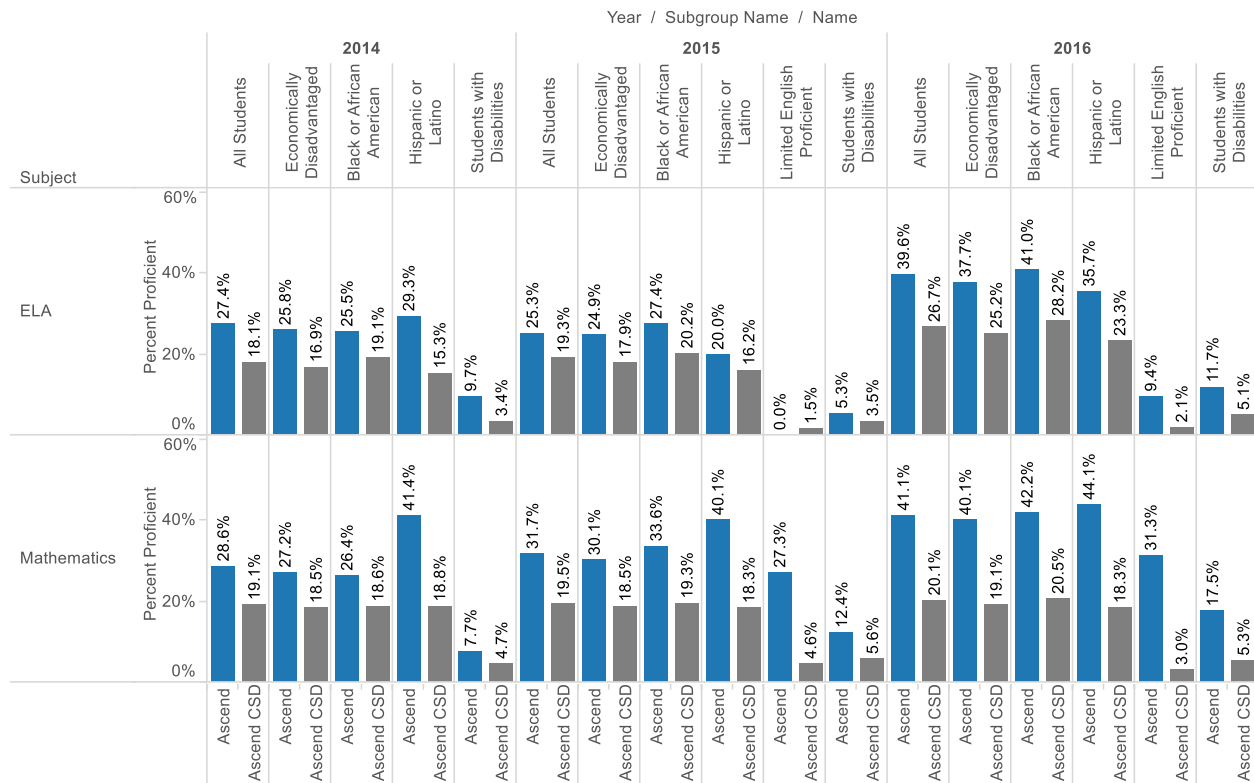
Performance of educationally disadvantaged subgroups

Educationally disadvantaged subgroups at Ascend—economically disadvantaged, African-American, and Hispanic students, as well as English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities—have also continued to show growth across the Ascend network over the past three years. Ascend students in these subgroups showed significant growth in the most recent school year, 2015-2016, surpassing that of their host district peers by ever-widening margins. **In each of the last three years Ascend students outperformed students in our host districts in both ELA and math in every subgroup in which we enrolled a significant number of students across that whole period: African-American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities.** See Appendix G: Student Academic Achievement for detailed information about the performance of Ascend student subgroups by individual Ascend charter school in relation to students in our host districts and New York State.

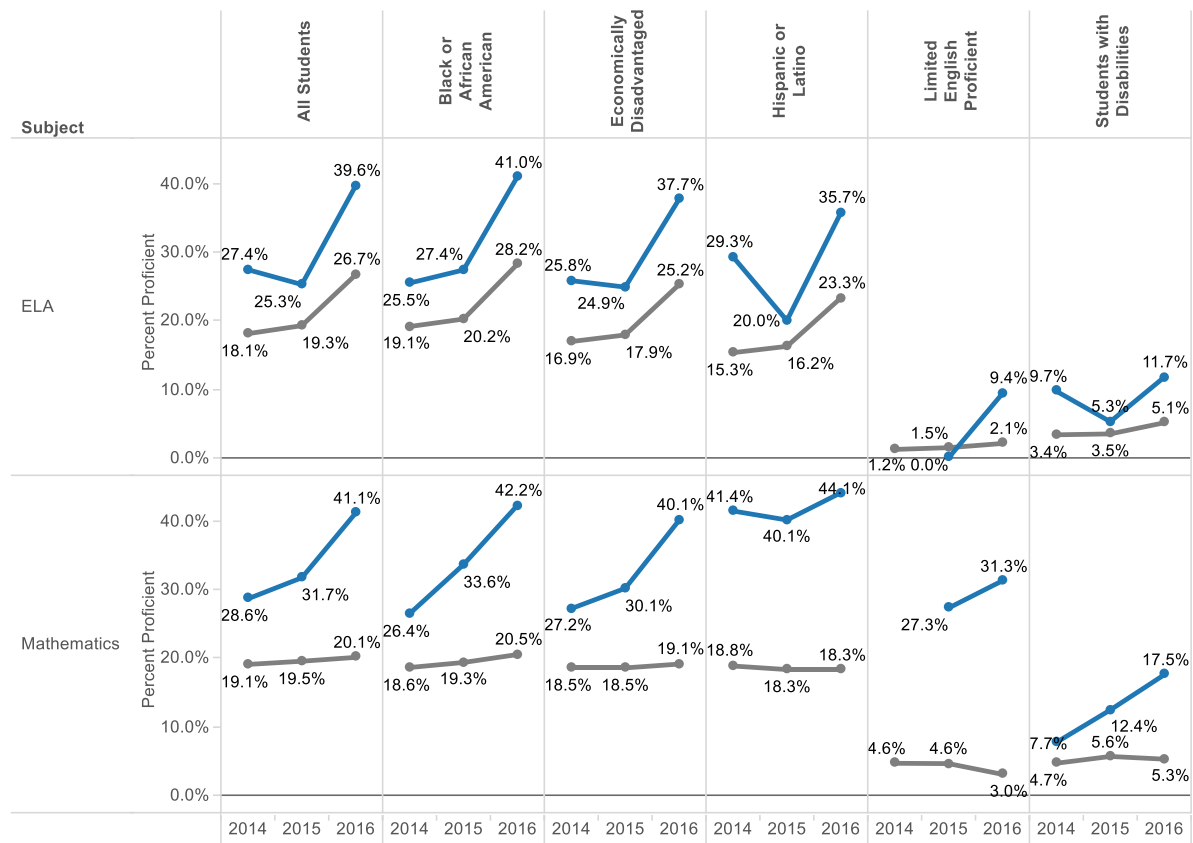
In 2015, we began reporting scores for our 11 ELLs in tested grades (0 percent in ELA and 27.3 percent in math). As our ELL population began to grow, we recognized the specific needs of this student group in our schools, and developed a research-based LEP instructional program, which has already had a significant impact on the achievement of our ELLs. In 2015-2016, the first year we enrolled a significant number of ELLs in tested grades (32 students), our ELL students' scores jumped to 9.4 in ELA and 31.3 in math, outperforming ELL peers in our host districts in ELA by 7.3 percentage points and in math by 28.3 percentage points.

In 2016, the math proficiency rate of Ascend students in every subgroup was more than double that of their subgroup peers in our host districts. Over the last three years, FRPL-eligible, African-American, and Hispanic students have all made significant gains in both ELA and math, and have also outperformed their subgroup peers in our host districts by significant margins.

Average percent proficient for Ascend (blue) and host district students (grey) by subgroup, 2014-2016

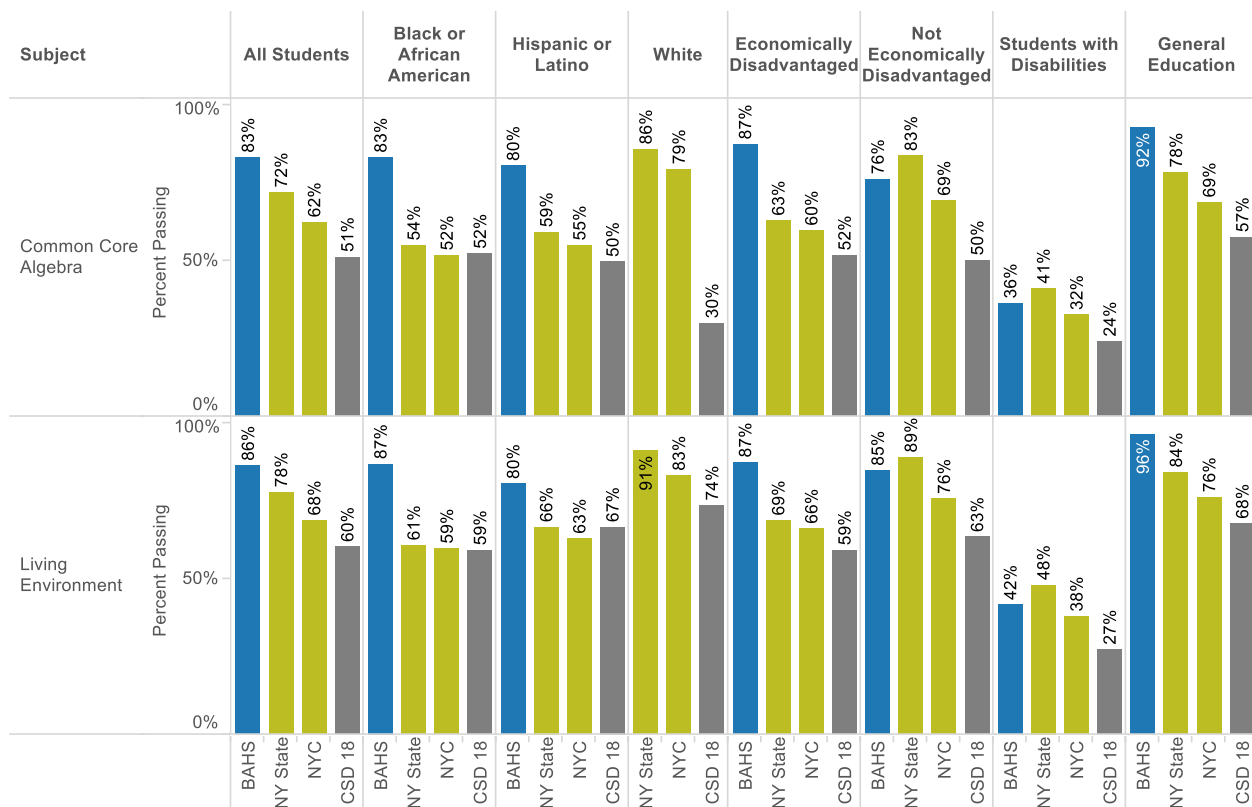


Change in proficiency rates, Ascend schools (blue) versus host districts (grey), 2014-2016



In our first year of operation at Brooklyn Ascend High School, on both the Common Core Algebra and Living Environment Regents exams, economically disadvantaged, African-American, and Hispanic students dramatically outperformed their peers in each subgroup in their host districts, New York City, and New York State. Remarkably, in Common Core Algebra, our economically disadvantaged students outperformed their economically *advantaged* peers in our host districts, New York City, and New York State. In Living Environment, our economically disadvantaged students outperformed their economically *advantaged* peers in our host districts and in New York City, falling short of matching the scores of economically advantaged students across the state by only 4 percentage points. Ascend students with disabilities outperformed their peers in their host districts and across New York City on both the Common Core Algebra and Living Environment Regents exams.

Regents passing rates overall and by subgroup for Ascend (blue), host districts (grey), and NY City and State (green), 2016



2) Extent to which the academic achievement results, including tests, attendance, retention, and growth, for educationally disadvantaged students have exceeded the average results for such students in the State (also fulfills Application Requirements (b)(2) and (b)(3)).

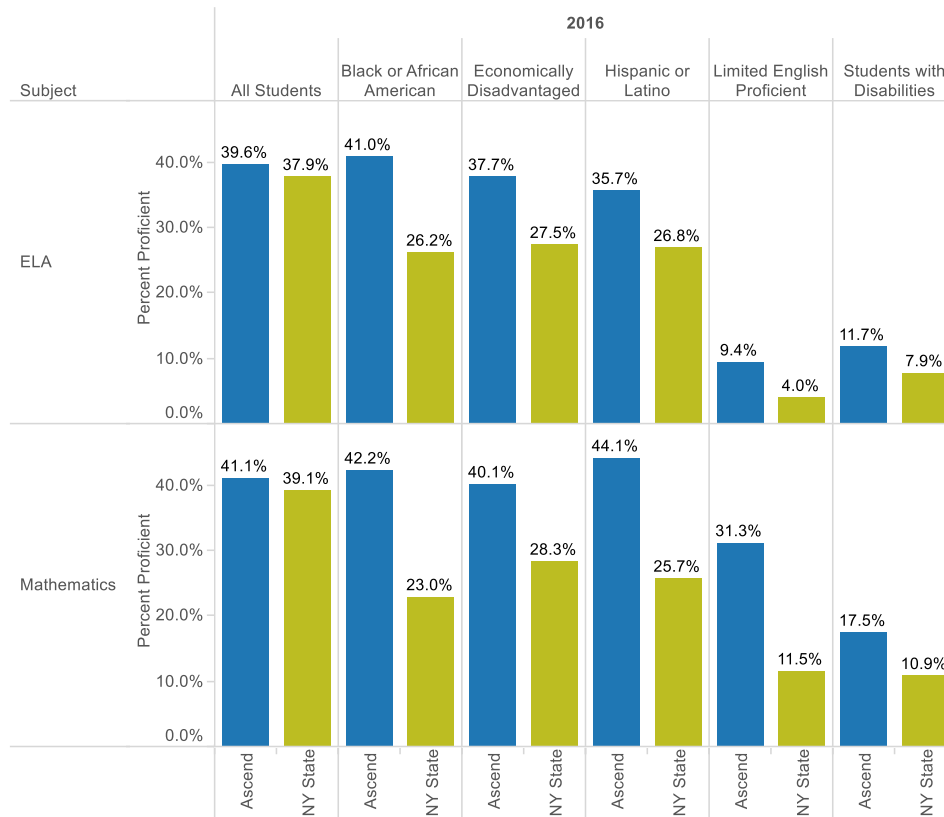
As noted above, Ascend schools have markedly exceeded the proficiency performance of their host districts and experienced gains over the past three years, with the most significant increases in the most recent school year, 2015-2016. Progress in accelerating academic achievement is particularly notable among Ascend student subgroups. Ascend enrollment mirrors the demographics of the communities in Central Brooklyn in which the schools are located. Across the Ascend network in 2016-2017, 82.7 percent of our students qualify for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL), 78.6 percent identify as African-American, and 21.7 percent as Hispanic (some students identify as both African-American and Hispanic, which is why the two percentages add up to more than 100 percent). In all but two of our nine school campuses, the population is at least 86 percent African-American. In our two Bushwick schools, the Hispanic population predominates at 75 percent. In the cases of both subgroups, Ascend enrollment either almost meets or exceeds the enrollment of these subgroups within the host districts.

Ascend has undertaken an active student recruitment strategy to increase enrollment of special populations, and as a result Ascend enrollment of students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency has been steadily increasing. Enrollment of special education students is, in school year 2016-2017, approaching that of the host districts. See Appendix I: Additional Information for detailed demographic and enrollment data.

In 2016, Ascend students outperformed students across New York State in average proficiency in both ELA and math, and in every subgroup: economically disadvantaged, African-American, Hispanic, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

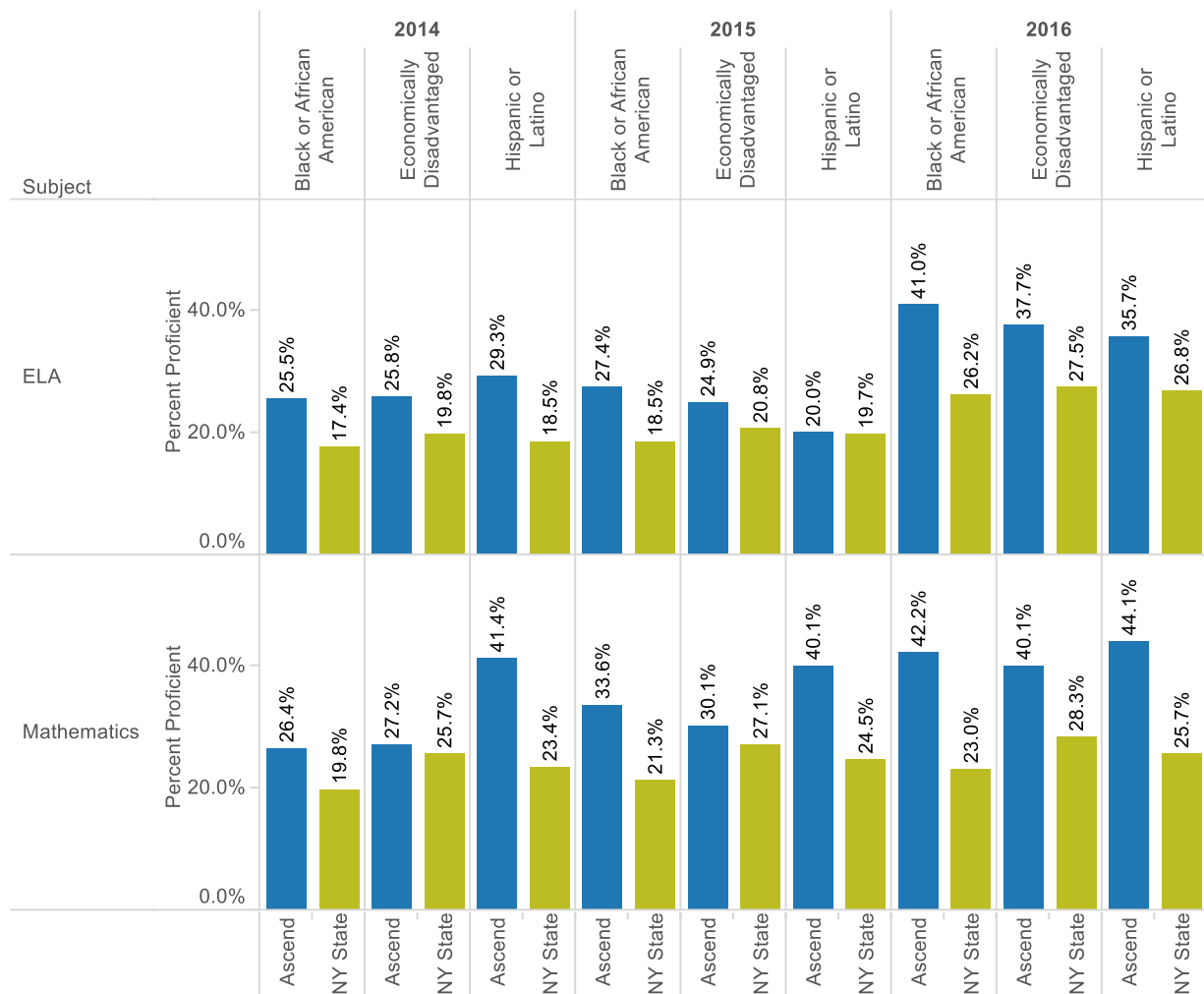
Economically disadvantaged, African-American, and Hispanic students at Ascend also scored above or within four points of the average for all students across the state.

Average proficiency overall and by subgroup for Ascend (blue) and New York State (green), 2016



In addition, over the last three years, every year, our economically disadvantaged, African-American, and Hispanic students have all achieved a higher average proficiency in both ELA and math than their peers from the same subgroups across the state.

Average percent proficient by subgroup for Ascend schools (blue) and NY State (green), 2014-2016



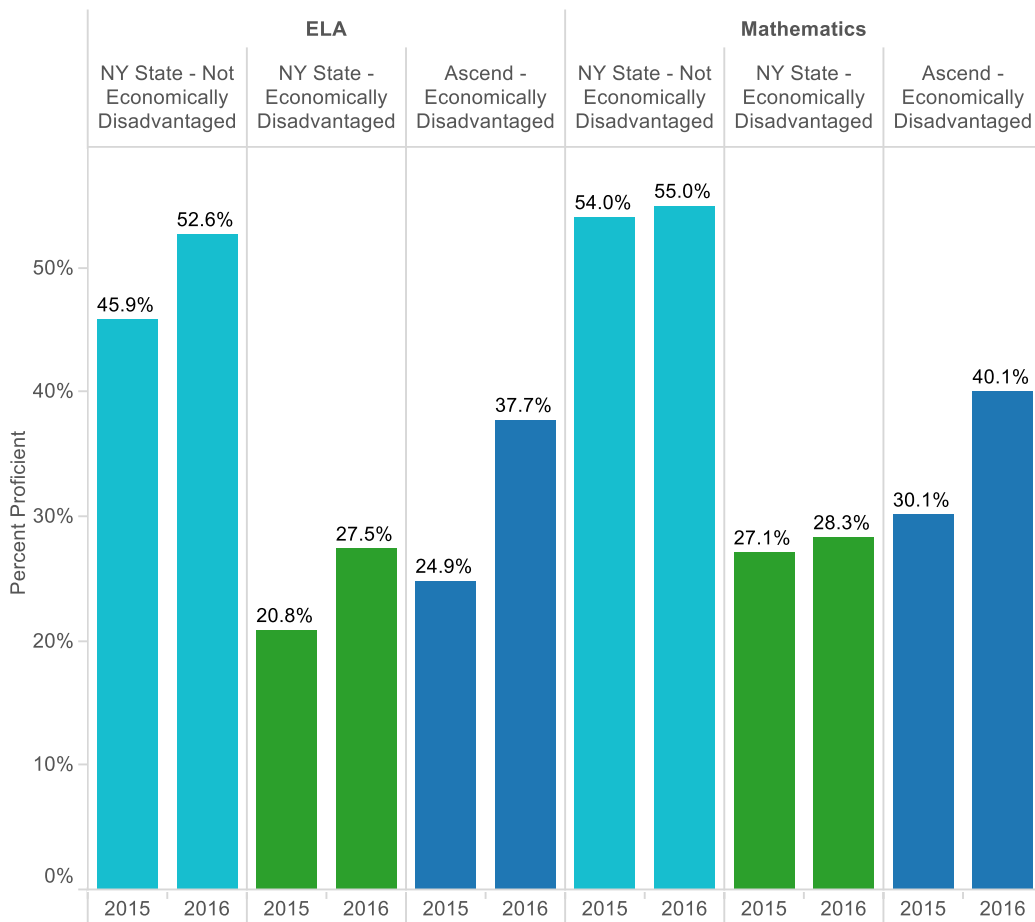
In terms of growth in average proficiency, the performance of educationally disadvantaged students at Ascend improved at much higher rates than their subgroup peers across New York State, demonstrating the power of an Ascend education to accelerate achievement for educationally disadvantaged students and make progress in closing the achievement gap.

Economically disadvantaged students

From 2015 to 2016, our economically disadvantaged students increased their average proficiency in both ELA and math by significantly higher margins than economically

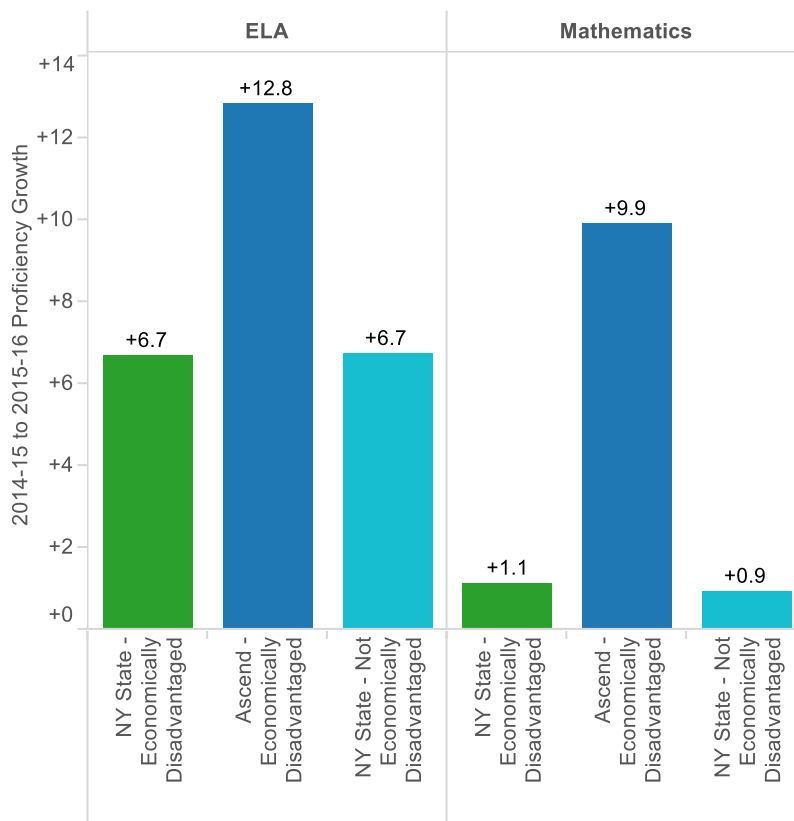
disadvantaged students statewide and more than *non*-economically disadvantaged students statewide.

Average percent proficient, Ascend economically disadvantaged students, and State economically and non-economically disadvantaged students, 2014-2016



In 2016, scores for economically disadvantaged students at Ascend grew in ELA by 12.8 percentage points and in math by 9.9 percentage points, versus 6.7 and 1.1 percentage points, respectively, for their economically disadvantaged peers, and 6.7 and 0.9, respectively, for economically advantaged students across the state, reflecting an accelerating trajectory toward closing the economic achievement gap.

Percentage points growth in average proficiency, Ascend economically disadvantaged students, and economically and non-economically disadvantaged students statewide, 2015 to 2016

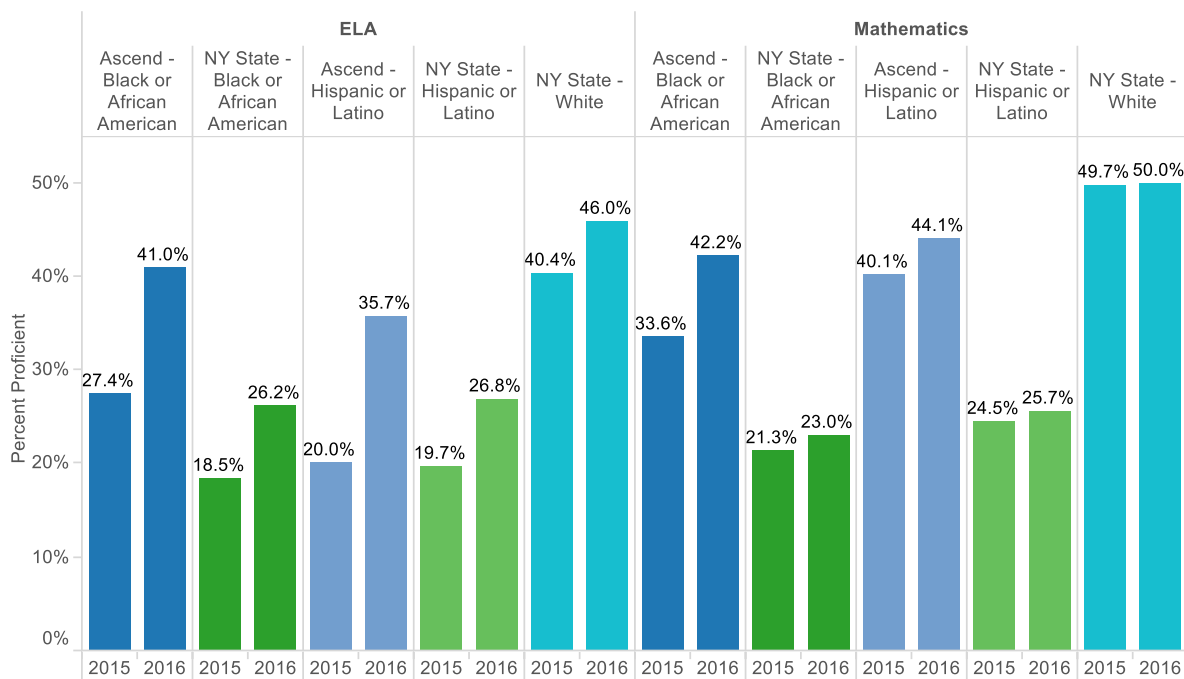


African-American and Hispanic students

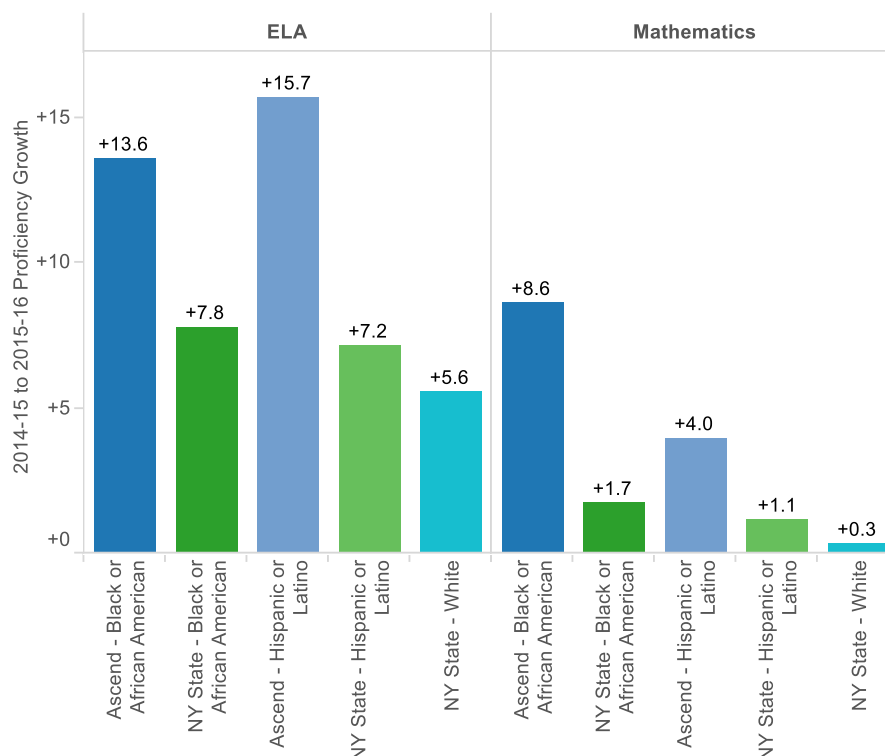
African-American students, who represent 78.6 percent of our student population in 2016-2017, increased their average proficiency in ELA and math from 2015 to 2016 at dramatically higher rates than their African-American and white peers across the state. Scores for African-American students at Ascend grew by 13.6 percentage points in ELA and by 8.6 percentage points in math, versus 7.8 and 1.7 percentage points, respectively, for African-American students across the state, and 5.6 and 0.3 percentage points, respectively, for white students. From 2015 to 2016, in both ELA and math, Hispanic students at Ascend increased their average proficiency scores by at least twice as many percentage points (15.7 in ELA and 4.0 in math) as did their Hispanic peers (7.2 in ELA and 1.1 in math) and white students (5.6 in ELA

and 0.3 in math) statewide. These significantly higher growth rates than white students demonstrate that African-American and Hispanic students at Ascend have narrowed the racial achievement gap and are on track to eliminating it.

Average percent proficient, African-American and Hispanic Ascend students and African-American and Hispanic State students, white students statewide, 2015 to 2016



Percentage points growth in average proficiency, African-American Ascend and State students, white students statewide, 2015 to 2016

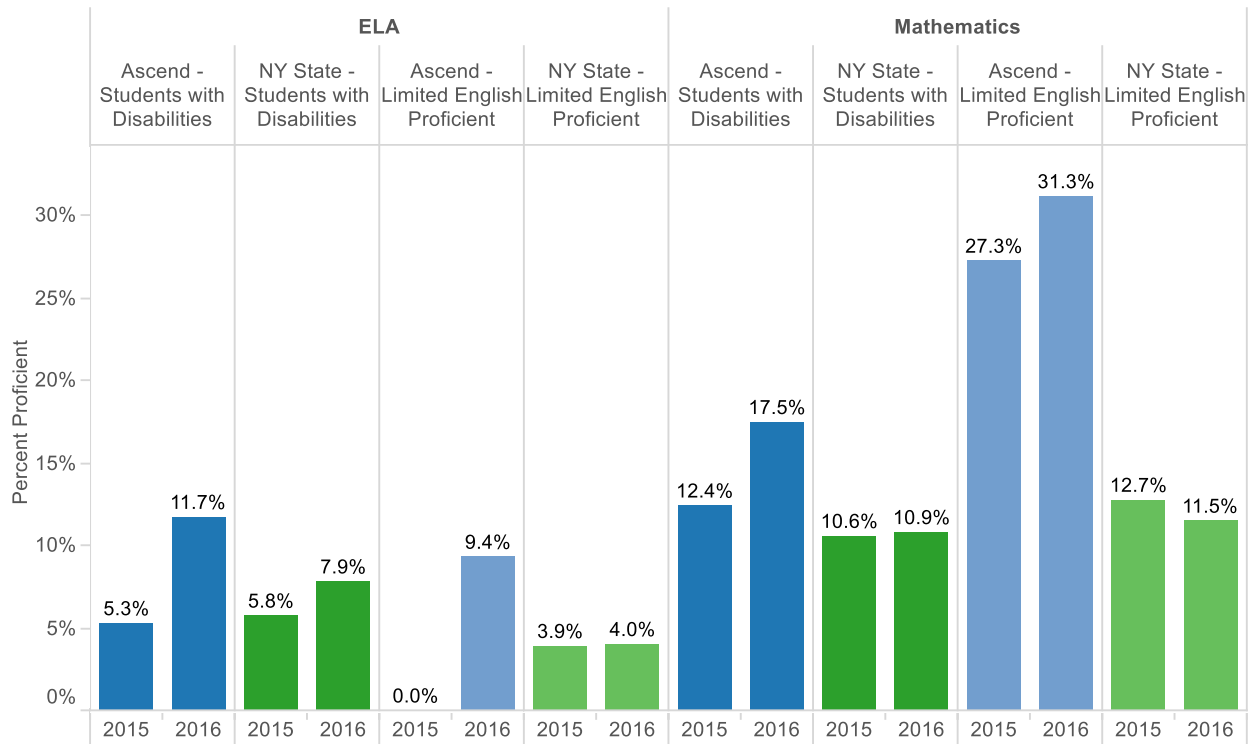


Students with disabilities and LEP students

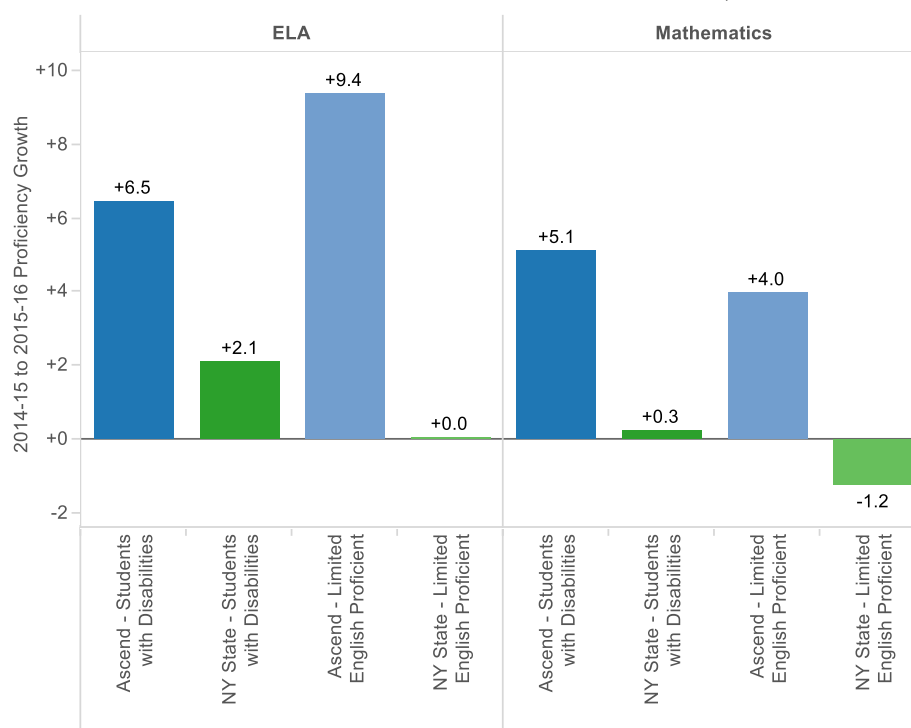
From 2014 to 2015, the average math proficiency of our students with disabilities increased twice as much as did that of students with disabilities statewide. From 2015 to 2016, the average ELA and math proficiency of our students with disabilities increased by significantly higher percentages than did those of students with disabilities statewide.

From 2015 to 2016, our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students also increased their proficiency by significantly more (9.4 percentage points in ELA, 4.0 in math) than their fellow LEP students statewide (0.0 in ELA, -1.2 in math).

Average percent proficient, Ascend students with disabilities and LEP students, and State students with disabilities and LEP students, 2015 to 2016



Percentage points growth in average proficiency, Ascend students with disabilities and LEP students, and State students with disabilities and LEP students, 2015 to 2016



For students in educationally disadvantaged subgroups, Ascend offers a rigorous and engaging education that propels them to higher average proficiency and growth rates than their peers in educationally disadvantaged subgroups across the state, as well as higher growth rates than more advantaged subgroups, narrowing historical achievement gaps.

In non-academic measures, Ascend average attendance rate across schools—made up of majority economically disadvantaged students— **was 96.2 percent in the 2015-2016 school year. This attendance rate was higher than both the average attendance rate of our host districts** (91.4 percent in 2015-2016), which have a similar student population to Ascend, **and the latest average attendance rate across New York state** (91.0 percent in 2013-2014), which has much lower rates of educationally disadvantaged students (54 percent economically disadvantaged and 18 percent African-American, for instance). *Please note that New York State does not provide attendance rates by sub-group.*

The average retention rate across all Ascend schools (87.3 percent in 2015-2016) is higher than the average retention rate of our host districts (83 percent), and the average retention rate at each Ascend charter school is higher in comparison to its specific host district(s) except for one school. Central Brooklyn Ascend moved from one Community School District to another in the 2015-2016 school year when its permanent facility was identified. Some families were unable to accommodate the transportation challenges to the new location and to their disappointment had to leave Central Brooklyn Ascend. *Please note that New York City does not provide retention rates by educationally disadvantaged subgroup, and New York State does not provide retention data at all.*

Suspension rates at Ascend schools have dropped from 9.5 percent across the network in 2013-2014 to 4.2 percent in 2015-2016 due to the adoption of our responsive and restorative cultural model across the network in 2014-2015. Our rate of suspensions is now comparable to the state as a whole (4.0 percent), which has a significantly lower percentage of educationally disadvantaged students than Ascend. In terms of educationally disadvantaged subgroups, our lowest suspension rates in 2015-2016 were for ELLs (1.6 percent) and Hispanic students (3.0 percent), with African-American and economically disadvantaged students at 4.5 and 4.6 percent, respectively. Our SPED students' suspension rates have gone down every year but continue to be the highest among our subgroups at 9.1 percent. We have worked this school year to decrease the number of suspensions of SPED students by integrating more effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention supports based on Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) best practices and by staffing more paraprofessionals to provide in-class support for students with demonstrated need. Ascend schools have had an average expulsion rate of 0 percent over the last three years, as only one student has been expelled during this time (in the 2013-2014 school

year). Please note that New York State does not provide suspension rates by educationally disadvantaged subgroup. See Appendix I: Additional Information for more detailed data on attendance, retention, suspension, and expulsion rates at Ascend schools by subgroup, in comparison to host districts and the State where data are available.

3) Information on any significant compliance and management issues (also fulfills Application Requirements (b)(4) and (c))

Ascend confirms that none of its charter schools has ever been closed; that it has never had a charter revoked due to noncompliance with statutory or regulatory requirements; that its schools have never had their affiliation with Ascend revoked or terminated; that it has not had significant issues in the area of financial or operational management; and that it has not experienced any issues in the area of student safety.

VII. SELECTION CRITERIA (B)—CONTRIBUTION IN ASSISTING EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS (also fulfills Application Requirement (i))

Charter management organizations in New York City have historically focused on Harlem and the Bronx, leaving Brooklyn underserved. We chose to open schools in Central Brooklyn because of its very high concentration of educationally disadvantaged students, especially in the borough's highest-need communities, including Brownsville, Bushwick, Canarsie, and East Flatbush, where Ascend's existing five charter schools are located. Demand for a college-preparatory educational alternative to the borough's district schools is enormous. As of February 1, 2017, Ascend had a waiting list of 3,725 unique applicants and 5,919 total applicants (some families apply to more than one school).

As public schools, Ascend schools are tuition-free and open to all by random lottery on a space-available basis. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ancestry, mental or physical disability, athletic performance, special needs, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement. In accordance with the law, we give preference to residents of the community school district in which the school is located and to siblings of students currently enrolled in the school. Beginning in school year 2017-2018, we will give preference to children whose parents work at the Ascend network or at one of our schools. For more information about our lottery and admissions process, see Appendix I: Additional Information.

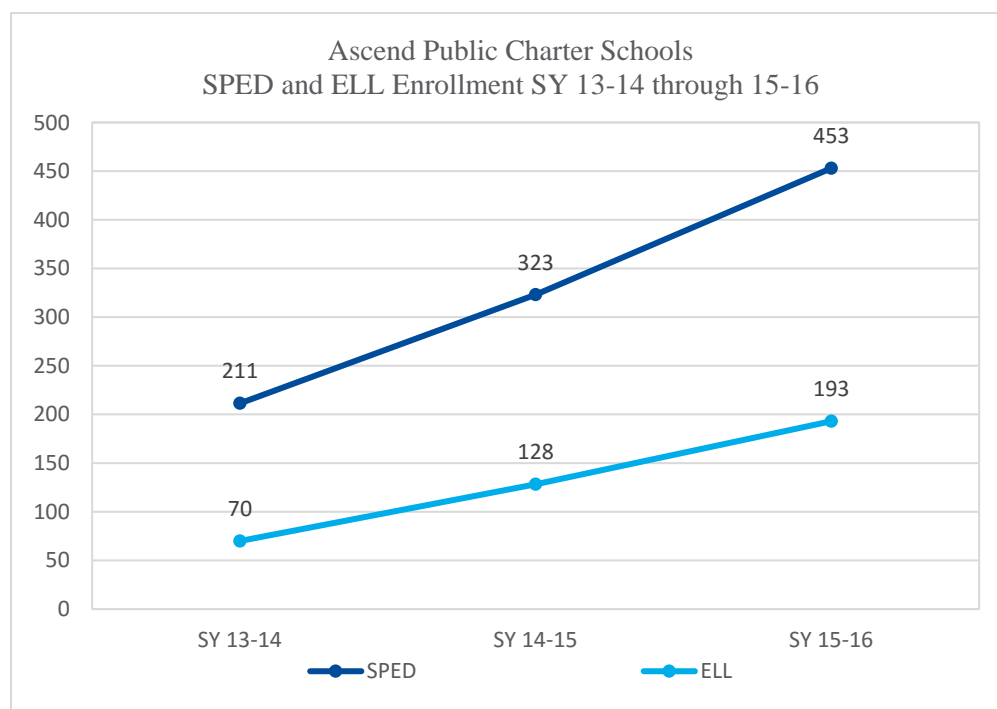
1. The extent to which charter schools currently operated or managed by the applicant serve educationally disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities and English learners, at rates comparable to surrounding public schools.

Brooklyn, where all of Ascend's current schools are located, is New York City's most populous borough, with 2.6 million residents. Were it a city, Brooklyn would be the fourth largest in the nation. Nearly one quarter of Brooklyn residents live in poverty; only 38 percent of residents over 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher; and only one quarter of Brooklyn's students are deemed college-ready. Brownsville, where the majority of Ascend's current students reside, is one of the poorest communities in the city and falls at or near the top of New York City's list of socially stressed communities on virtually every metric of social distress. Some 40 percent of families live below the poverty line, and the community has the highest concentration of public housing in the country.

The Ascend schools located in Brownsville (Brooklyn Ascend and Brownsville Ascend) enroll 97 percent African-American and Hispanic students and 84 percent students who qualify

for FRPL, in line with their host districts. Other Brooklyn communities served by Ascend are home to students with levels of educational disadvantage similar to Brownsville. Our schools in the Bushwick and Canarsie neighborhoods serve students who are, respectively, 94 percent and 92 percent African-American and Hispanic, in line with their host districts. Central Brooklyn Ascend in East Flatbush serves a much higher percentage of African-American and Hispanic students at 95 percent than its host district (49 percent) because of the specific neighborhood within the large host district where the school is located. The percentages of students who are eligible for FRPL are 85 percent at both Bushwick Ascend and Central Brooklyn Ascend, and 72 percent at Canarsie Ascend, similar to those of their host districts. See Appendix I: Additional Information for more detailed demographic information.

Across our network, Ascend serves 13 percent special education (SPED) and 5 percent English language learner (ELL) students, somewhat lower, on average, than our host districts. Bushwick Ascend Charter School, though, serves more ELLs than its host district (23.4 percent versus 20 percent). Enrolling higher percentages of SPED and ELL students in our schools is a priority across the network, and these populations have grown at our schools every year.



Over the last three years, we have undertaken significant targeted outreach to increase our SPED and ELL populations. See Selection Criteria (B)(2) below for more information about our targeted outreach and Appendix I: Additional Information for detailed information about our growing percentages of ELLs and students with disabilities.

Ascend's education model and educationally disadvantaged students (also fulfills Application Requirements (e)(1), (e)(3), and (k))

Nearly all of Ascend's students today are educationally disadvantaged, and our educational program was designed specifically to ensure that they meet the New York State Common Core achievement standards and are admitted to, and graduate from, college. The Ascend college-preparatory program has six elements:

A rigorous and engaging liberal arts curriculum. By offering a rich liberal arts education in a supportive environment, Ascend provides an education that prizes critical thinking and questioning, celebrates (and yet challenges) the literary canon; encompasses math, science, music, and the arts; cultivates moral judgment and civic responsibility; and fosters independence of thought and action. All Ascend schools will teach to mastery a rigorous, sequential, Common Core-aligned curriculum composed of top-of-class commercial instructional programs and Ascend-developed curricula, including Ascend's own ambitious program in the humanities.

A warm and supportive student culture. Our responsive and restorative cultural model allows our schools to focus on both intellectual and social learning and problem-solving. We implement the Responsive Classroom model in the lower and middle grades, and restorative practices in high school. These models, which develop student capacity to self-manage, and replace punitive measures with logical consequences, have resulted in marked declines in suspension and referral rates at Ascend schools. In a multi-year randomized controlled study

sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, researchers determined a significant positive association between employment of the Responsive Classroom model and student academic performance on reading and math.

An extended school day. The Ascend school day is 60 minutes longer than the traditional school day, resulting in two additional years of instruction over the course of a K-12 education. Many educationally disadvantaged students arrive to kindergarten already behind their more advantaged peers and need the additional time to achieve at similar levels.

Effective use of assessments and intervention. Ascend has created a powerful culture of instructional data, where precisely constructed network-wide benchmark assessments and state-of-art instructional data software allow teachers, leaders, and students to track progress toward Common Core standard attainment and to precisely target instruction to address academic gaps. Research has repeatedly shown that formative assessment is one of the most effective instructional strategies for raising achievement. At Ascend, we regularly employ a variety of formative assessment tools to help students individually or in small groups who are struggling in any of their core subjects, which helps all students and especially benefits English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

An innovative approach to talent development. In addition to an annual two-week summer Leader Institute for leaders, Summer Institutes for all teachers (four weeks for new teachers), and weekly professional development, teachers meet regularly in grade-level teams in Ascend's signature collaborative planning program, Teacher Planning and Development (TPD). Teachers study upcoming unit content, examine student work as formative assessments, analyze student data, and practice lessons with their peers. TPD has contributed to strong teacher satisfaction and retention and, in turn, to strong gains in student achievement network-wide.

A college preparation program. College persistence requires much more than academic preparation. The Ascend college readiness and persistence seminar, a required course for every student each year of high school, develops the non-cognitive skills students need for college. College trips, a College Readiness Portfolio, family workshops, and an alumni program are other essential components of the Ascend model. Together, they will ensure that when Ascend students graduate, they are set not only to enroll in college, but to persist and thrive once there.

2. The quality of the plan to ensure that the charter schools the applicant proposes to replicate or expand will recruit and enroll educationally disadvantaged students (also fulfills Application Requirement (i)).

The existing five Ascend charter schools will grow through the addition of elementary, middle, and high school grades during the timeline of the project. The five new replication schools will also open in Brooklyn, where there are a total of 309,473 public school children, many in communities with similar levels of educational disadvantage.

In planning for its replication schools and determining the locations for these schools within the Ascend growth plan, Ascend reviewed the data for several candidate community school districts (CSDs) in Brooklyn beyond the CSDs in which Ascend already operates. The data review process included FRPL eligibility, state exam scores, college enrollment and completion rates, charter penetration, and density of school-age children by Census tract; for all data points, we examine the information by general population and race/ethnic sub-population levels. Ascend winnowed the list to only those districts with demographics matching Ascend's targeted population of educationally disadvantaged students, and with facilities favorable for siting Ascend schools.

As a result of this process, Ascend has decided to employ a regional strategy of expansion within the current community school districts where it operates (CSDs 17, 18, 22, 23, and 32), as well as a contiguous district, CSD 19 (East New York). The growth of the Ascend network in these neighboring educationally disadvantaged Brooklyn communities provides an opportunity to open a critical mass of high-performing schools within a focused geographic cluster with minimal management complexity and maximal opportunity for sharing of best practices across schools.

As with the communities we currently serve, East New York is a socially distressed community, ranking 8th, 11th, and 17th out of the 59 New York City community districts in elementary school absenteeism, poverty, and unemployment, respectively. Only 19 percent of adults in East New York have earned a college degree. CSD 19 enrolls 90 percent African-American and Hispanic, 84 percent FRPL-eligible, 23 percent SPED, and 12 percent ELL students. Students in CSD 19 achieved 23 percent proficiency in English Language Arts and 18 percent proficiency in math on the 2016 state exam, substantially below the average for the Ascend network (40 percent proficiency in ELA and 41 percent proficiency in math).

In the first year of the project, 2017-18, Ascend will expand its five existing charter schools, including opening one new middle school campus and adding grades at existing campuses, and engage in an intensive planning year for the opening of two new charters in year 2 of the project. These two charters will open in CSD 22 (Flatbush/East Flatbush), the home of Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School, and CSD 19 (East New York), which borders two of our existing districts—CSD 18 (Canarsie/Brownsville) and CSD 23 (Brownsville). The additional three new Ascend charter schools will open in years 3, 4, and 5 of the project and will be located in our existing CSDs and/or CSD 19, the adjacent host district where we are opening a

new school in year 2. Over the course of the CSP project, Ascend will create 3,852 new seats in educationally disadvantaged areas of Brooklyn, ultimately serving a total of 8,081 students.

Please see p. 4-5 of the Selection Criteria introduction and Selection Criteria D—Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel for details on our replication and expansion plans.

Recruitment and retention of African-American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students

In line with the practices of our existing schools, the new Ascend replication schools will conduct ongoing marketing efforts throughout the life of their charters to enroll new grades each year, replace students lost through attrition, and maintain a robust wait list.

To ensure that educationally disadvantaged children and their families are aware of the opportunity to enroll in new Ascend schools, Ascend will conduct a rigorous recruitment campaign each year throughout our host districts, including postcards, emails, leafletting at subways and other busy areas, and advertising (print, environmental, and digital). The network recruitment team and staff will also recruit students by reaching out to elected officials, doctors' offices, churches, grocery stores, restaurants, and diverse community organizations. Each existing and new school will hold multiple information sessions during the winter and spring to allow families to visit the buildings and meet staff. Marketing materials translated into Spanish and French (for French-speaking Caribbean populations) will emphasize that the schools are tuition-free public schools of choice that welcome and serve *all* children. Ascend schools impose no admissions preconditions or requirements. Families are encouraged but never required to attend meetings or information sessions, adhere to the school's mission or philosophy, or sign any agreements or contracts imposing responsibilities or commitments, such as reviewing homework or volunteering for the school.

As discussed above, Ascend schools generally serve a comparable proportion of African-American, Hispanic, and FRPL-eligible students as their host districts. As a result, the new Ascend replication schools will mostly rely on current student recruitment strategies to attract African-American, Hispanic, and FRPL-eligible students. We are confident in our ability to enroll these subgroups of students at rates similar to our existing schools given that we are opening schools in existing host districts—where we receive approximately five applications for every open seat—and in one adjacent community district.

Additionally, since Ascend’s existing schools already enroll such a high percentage of African-American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, the network’s current overall student retention rates are a good indicator of the ability to retain these sub-populations of students. From school year 2016 to school year 2017, Ascend’s five charter schools achieved an average student retention rate of 87 percent, including students who relocated out of the district, which is 4 percentage points higher than the average retention rate across our host districts (83 percent).

Recruitment and retention of SPED and LEP students

As we have done for the last three years in our existing schools, Ascend will work diligently to attract and retain students with disabilities and ELLs in numbers comparable to the host districts in which the new schools reside, ensuring that such students are strongly welcomed and served effectively. During the recruitment season every year, staff will work closely with the district Committee on Special Education (CSE) offices to reach out to populations of students with special needs, distributing promotional materials to childcare centers (including Head Start facilities) with IEP populations, early intervention programs, the Brooklyn Early Childhood Direction Center, and other community agencies that serve children with disabilities. The schools

will also employ an outreach strategy to cultivate relationships with businesses, immigrant support centers, and other organizations serving minority-language communities in the district. For example, the schools will distribute dual-language flyers to businesses and organizations that are owned by members of minority-language communities or are frequented by non-English speakers, e.g., ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, churches, and daycare centers. The schools will also effectively train staff involved in student enrollment to help and support families to accurately identify their children as ELLs.

All marketing materials will include explicit language stating that the new—and existing—Ascend schools are tuition-free public schools of choice that welcome and serve *all* students, including special education students and ELLs. The schools will translate marketing materials into Spanish and French, and have a native Spanish speaker available at the schools during the enrollment season, which will foster inclusion of non-English-speaking families and help to integrate the schools more fully in the life of the community.

Once enrolled, faculty and staff at the Ascend replication schools will embrace students with special needs and ELLs with the same enthusiasm they welcome all students. Ascend's goal is to ensure that all students obtain a high-quality education regardless of their individual impediments or language requirements. For students with disabilities, the new Ascend replication schools will offer a remedial program for English and math, supplemental evidence-based instruction, a longer school year, and several support settings, including co-teaching. Ascend ELLs will be provided with English as a New Language instruction that supports swift and steady language acquisition, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. A key priority of the Ascend network is to continue to evolve and enhance our ELL offerings, including

adding more ELL specialists to our schools with ELL populations, to ensure we are providing the most effective programming for our English Language Learners.

The culture at our replication schools will be one of caring and compassion, where students will value one another's differences, cheer for their peers who are struggling, and celebrate progress. All students will be regarded as scholars and treated as such. Students who might otherwise be consigned to separate offerings and held to a lesser standard will thrive with a program that builds their knowledge systematically and provides effective support for special needs students and language support for ELLs. This powerful culture of achievement for *all* and emphasis on teamwork and sense of family will contribute to low attrition rates at our new schools (resembling our low attrition rates at current Ascend schools).

The schools' most effective recruitment and retention tool for students with disabilities and ELLs will be the parent body. Faculty and staff will communicate regularly with all families via email, text, and phone, and at parent-teacher conferences and school events. Special meetings with families of children with special needs and language learning requirements (to discuss placement, changes of services, progress, and the like) will provide additional opportunities for faculty and staff to gauge family satisfaction and respond to any concerns.

The average rate of retention over the last three years for Ascend students with disabilities (89.2 percent) is higher than the average rate of retention for our overall population over the last three years (87.1 percent), and higher than the average rate of retention for our host districts across all student populations in 2013-2014 (83 percent), the most recent year for which data are available. Ascend schools also have a proven track record of retaining ELLs at rates equal to or greater than the overall Ascend student population and our host districts. For instance, from the 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 school year, the average rate of retention for all students

across the network was 87.3 percent, while the average rate for ELLs was 88.4 percent, with three out of five Ascend charter schools achieving 100 percent retention. Given these retention rates, future Ascend schools are likely to retain students with disabilities and ELLs at rates equal to or greater than their local host districts.

Family and community involvement (also fulfills Application Requirement (h))

In the months prior to submission of a new charter application, Ascend engages in a robust outreach campaign aimed at securing meaningful feedback and support from community leaders, elected officials, and the public at large.

With the help of external community organizers, Ascend develops a list of elected officials, community-based organizations, and high-volume public and commercial centers that serve the target communities. The outreach team holds meetings and conversations with as many community leaders as possible to inform them of Ascend's educational model and its plans for expansion while also soliciting as much feedback as possible. We also network with staff at daycares, libraries, community centers, and religious organizations to facilitate the spread of information about Ascend. Our direct outreach methods include flyering high-traffic commercial and residential areas, distributing press releases to local media outlets, posting web and social media announcements, circulating online feedback surveys, and organizing street teams of Ascend staff and parent volunteers. We attempt to inform residents of the target communities, particularly those families with connections to school-age children, of the educational opportunities afforded by Ascend, not only with the goal of garnering support for Ascend's expansion, but to forge long-lasting relationships and partnerships in the communities we hope to serve. Before proceeding with the submission of a new charter application, we ensure that

support for these efforts among community members and leaders is extensive and strong, as expressed through petitions and letters to Ascend’s authorizer.

In existing schools, Ascend families are critical partners on a student’s path to and through college. In the Ascend design, school directors have primary responsibility for communicating with and engaging family members, all of whom are asked but not required to sign a voluntary learning contract that underscores their commitment to supporting school rules, values, and procedures. Ascend schools communicate with families on a regular basis through calls, texts, letters home, and emails to build and maintain strong relationships. Ascend schools also hold monthly meetings of Family Associations to provide a forum for families to give input to school governance and offer opportunities for families to engage in community events.

Compliance with IDEA (also fulfills Application Requirement (j))

Ascend takes pride in its special education programs; our mission is to serve every student who comes to our doors and is admitted by public lottery. All Ascend schools provide all special education students and English Language Learners with a free and appropriate education and comply with all local, state, and federal special education and non-discrimination laws. In New York City, the Local Education Agency (LEA) is the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE). Ascend collaborates closely with the LEA to implement each child’s individual education plan (IEP), which is determined by the DOE’s Committees on Special Education. In compliance with IDEA section 613(a)(5) and 613(e)(1)(B), our LEA serves students with disabilities in the same manner as students with disabilities in other schools within the LEA, provides supplementary services, and provides funds to Ascend schools on the same basis as other public schools. For more information on our compliance with IDEA, please see Appendix I—Additional Information.

VIII. SELECTION CRITERIA (C)—QUALITY OF THE EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT *(also fulfills Application Requirement (d))*

Ascend is a highly data-driven organization focused on achieving clearly defined results across all of our schools. Ascend’s five-year replication and expansion project has three overarching goals that reflect our broader mission as an organization:

1. **Growth:** Through Ascend’s proven replication and expansion process, create an additional 3,852 new seats through grade expansion and campus openings at existing schools and the opening of five new charter schools in Brooklyn, NY.
2. **Quality:** Provide primarily economically disadvantaged students in educationally underserved communities, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, with an ambitious liberal arts education in a warm and supportive setting that prepares them to thrive in college, career, and citizenship.
3. **Scalable Model:** Demonstrate a public schooling model that employs organizational efficiencies and an effective talent strategy, and operates at public spending levels.

Ascend has five objectives for the project. Outcomes aligned to each objective allow us to measure progress towards these objectives and our overall goals for the network and for Ascend students.

Objectives	Outcomes
Objective 1: Expand the schools that are currently operating in the Ascend network by one grade each year, open five new school campuses, and launch five additional schools in economically disadvantaged communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 1a: Open new schools, campuses, and grades: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 1, expand by three new grades and open one new middle school campus under existing charters; • Year 2, expand by three new grades, open two new campuses (one middle and one high school), and open two new charter schools serving grades K-1; • Year 3, expand by five new grades, open a new high school campus, and open one new charter school serving grades K-1; • Year 4, expand by seven new grades and open two new schools serving grades K-1; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 5, expand by seven new grades and open one new high school campus for a total of 3,852 new seats created. • Outcome 1b: Every year, at least 60% of Ascend students qualify for FRPL. • Outcome 1c: By the end of the grant period, SPED and ELL levels at all Ascend schools are comparable to surrounding communities.
Objective 2: Provide a rich, rigorous liberal arts academic program to close the achievement gap for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 2a: Annually, the percentage of students in the Ascend network scoring at or above Level 3 on the New York State ELA and math exams is equal to or greater than the average across New York State. • Outcome 2b: All Ascend students will reach 75% proficiency in ELA, math, and science on state exams by the final year of the project. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the 2017-18 school year, Ascend students will score an average proficiency rate of 62% in ELA, 63.2% in math, and 90.5% in science. • For the 2018-2019 school year, Ascend students will score an average proficiency rate of 68.5% in ELA, 69.1% in math, and 92.7% in science. • For the 2019-2020 school year, Ascend students will score an average proficiency rate of 71.7% in ELA, 72.1% in math, and 93.9% in science. • For the 2020-2021 school year, Ascend students will score an average proficiency rate of 73.4% in ELA, 73.5% in math, and 94.4% in science. • For the 2021-2022 school year, Ascend students will score an average proficiency rate of 75% in ELA and math and 95% in science.
Objective 3: Set all students on a path to and through college (actual graduation data will fall outside of the project period).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 3a: At least 95% of surveyed middle school students indicate that they plan to attend a four-year college or university after graduation. • Outcome 3b: Ascend graduating seniors gain acceptance to a two- or four-year college at a rate of 100%. • Outcome 3c: Ascend graduates matriculate at college at a rate of 90% or greater within one year of graduating from high school. • Outcome 3d: Ascend graduates enrolled in college will earn at least 10 credits per semester at a rate of 95% during the period of the grant (Ascend's first high school class will graduate in June 2019, so Ascend will report on data for students who enter college in 2019, 2020, and 2021, i.e. years 3, 4 and 5 of the grant).
Objective 4: Foster a warm, intellectually engaging culture that allows students to thrive and act with a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 4a: The average student attendance rate across Ascend schools is 95% or greater. • Outcome 4b: Students return to Ascend schools every year at an average rate of 90% or greater. • Outcome 4c: Suspension rates at Ascend are an average rate of 10% or lower.

strong sense of agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 4d: Student growth rates in non-cognitive skills exceed those in the sample of “no excuses” charter school students studied by the Boston Charter Research Collaborative.
Objective 5: Recruit, hire, retain, and develop high-performing educators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 5a: At least 75% of teachers accept Ascend’s offers of employment. • Outcome 5b: At least 80% of teachers return to the Ascend network the following year. • Outcome 5c: At least 80% of teachers report on surveys that they would recommend teaching at Ascend to a friend/colleague.
Objective 6: Operate financially sustainable schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 6a: All schools increase their cash on hand year-over-year until they reach a minimum of 30 days cash on hand. • Outcome 6b: Annual student enrollment at each school is within 15% of full enrollment as defined in the school’s charter. • Outcome 6c: An annual independent financial audit of each school results in an unqualified opinion and no major findings.

See Appendix I: Additional Information for the complete Ascend logic model with objectives, activities, outcomes during the grant period, and long-term objectives.

Our evaluation plan for the CSP project includes both an internal and external evaluation to closely monitor and measure the ultimate effectiveness of our project and our schools.

Internal evaluation

To continuously improve our work and reach our goals, Ascend closely tracks performance on objective measures of quality. During the CSP grant period and beyond, we will continuously measure ourselves against the detailed outcomes outlined above. Academic and behavioral data will be reviewed monthly by the Ascend Charter Schools Board of Trustees. Ascend will use these and other performance measures, including parent and staff survey data, on an ongoing basis to adjust and refine our education program and its implementation as we expand and replicate our schools.

Goal 1: Growth: Ascend will use the following performance measures to track progress toward, and determine whether we have met the Growth goal:

- Number of grades expanded, and new campuses and schools opened every year

- Number of students served
- Percent of African-American and Hispanic students at each Ascend school
- Percentage of students who qualify for FRPL at each Ascend school
- Percentage of SPED and ELL students at each Ascend school

Goal 2: Quality: Ascend will use the following performance measures to track progress toward, and determine whether we have met the Quality goal:

- Percentages of Ascend students proficient on state tests in ELA, math, and science, relative to the average proficiency levels across New York State (overall and by subgroups, including comparison of educationally disadvantaged subgroups to their more educationally advantaged peers, namely non-economically disadvantaged, white, general education, and non-LEP students)
- Percentages of middle school students who indicate that they plan to attend a college or university after graduation
- Percentages of Ascend high school graduates who gain acceptance, matriculate, and persist in college
- Student attendance, retention, and suspension rates across Ascend
- Growth rates of Ascend students in non-cognitive skills as compared to students involved in the Boston Charter Research Collaborative
- Percentages of teacher offer acceptance rate and retention across Ascend schools, and percentage of teachers who would recommend teaching at Ascend to a friend or colleague
- Levels of satisfaction with Ascend schools in NYC DOE student, teacher, and parent surveys

Goal 3: Scalable Model: Ascend will use the following performance measures to track progress toward and determine whether we have met the Scalable Model goal:

- Growth of cash on hand year over year at each school, with a goal of 30 days cash on hand.
- Number of schools with annual enrollment each year of 15 percent of full enrollment for that year as defined by the school's charter.
- Annual independent financial audit of each school and the network.

Ascend's performance measures are consistent with the existing performance measures established for the Charter Schools Program, and will accurately evaluate Ascend's performance on the project. Our goals, objectives, and outcomes are ambitious in that we aim to close the achievement gap for the educationally disadvantaged students we serve, and yet achievable—as evidenced by our success to date in growth, quality, and development of a scalable model.

External evaluation

If Ascend is selected for a CSP grant, Associate Professor Martin West of Harvard University has agreed to lead an independent, lottery-based (i.e., randomized-control trial) evaluation of the Ascend model designed (1) to assess the attainment of the grant objectives, and (2) to generate evidence for the field on the extent to which its innovative liberal arts academic program supports student success in school and beyond. (See letters from Professor West and Harvard University Office for Sponsored Programs in Appendix I: Additional Information.) Ascend has established an ambitious set of objectives with respect to enrollment growth, academic and non-academic student outcomes, and financial sustainability. In addition to tracking the organization's progress toward achieving these objectives, the evaluation will seek

to understand Ascend’s impact on its students relative to the schools they would otherwise attend.

Research design and data collection. The proposed evaluation will evaluate the impact of the Ascend model on student academic achievement; student non-cognitive skill development; and student, parent, and teacher satisfaction with school. The core of the study will be a randomized-control trial testing the effect of being offered admission to an Ascend school on the following student outcomes: performance on state standardized exams, attendance, suspension, and high school graduation. The researchers will rely on Ascend lottery data to identify students who randomly won and lost the opportunity to attend an Ascend school. Once these students are identified, the researchers will securely transmit the lottery data to the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) so that it can be matched to each student’s records.

To analyze these data, the evaluation will use an intent-to-treat model to estimate the causal effect of being offered an opportunity to attend an Ascend school on student outcomes. This approach is consistent with the methods employed in previous studies of charter schools that have met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards “without reservations.” The researchers will also follow WWC guidelines for addressing missing data, including student-level characteristics as controls in the models, using appropriate statistical techniques to account for clustering of students within schools, and focusing all confirmatory analyses on a limited set of pre-specified outcomes.

The evaluation sample size will allow for the detection of effects in the range that researchers would expect based on previous evaluations of urban charter schools and similar interventions. Ascend currently serves approximately 4,000 students in grades K to 10 and there are more than 5,900 applicants on its waiting lists. Furthermore, Ascend plans to double its

student population over the five-year grant period. By the end of the five-year period, there will be four cohorts of Ascend high school graduates, allowing the study to examine the effect of the Ascend model on high school completion.

The researchers will work with NYC DOE to access student-level school records data, as DOE has afforded other researchers for similar studies of charter performance. They also intend to examine publicly available data to compare the achievement gains of Ascend students to the aggregate performance gains of students in schools in the four Community School Districts from which the Ascend students are drawn, controlling for demographic characteristics of these schools' student populations (e.g., racial/ethnic makeup, percent English Language Learners, percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, etc.).

Moreover, Ascend administers the Measures of Academic Progress assessment developed by the Northwest Evaluation Association to all of its students once every school year. Data from MAP assessments will provide additional measures to triangulate Ascend's impacts on student outcomes, particularly on non-high-stakes exams and among students below third grades who do not take the assessments that are mandated by the state of New York. The MAP data will make it possible to compare the gains made by Ascend students to demographically matched students nationally. One limitation of lottery-based estimates of the impact of attending Ascend is that they will be influenced by both the performance of Ascend and that of the schools attended by lottery losers. They do not allow us to compare the progress of these students relative to state or national norms, which the MAP data will allow us to do. Specifically, the researchers will be able to compare the gains made by Ascend students to demographically matched students in other state and nationally representative populations.

In addition to the lottery-based study of academic outcomes, a novel feature of the evaluation will be an analysis of student non-cognitive skill development—a key focus of the Ascend model. The researchers will use teacher- and self-report surveys to annually measure Ascend students’ growth in areas such as self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, and growth mindset. They will then compare Ascend students’ growth on these measures to the growth of demographically similar students attending six high-performing “no excuses” charter networks that are currently administering the same measures to their students as part of the Boston Charter Research Collaborative, a multi-year partnership between the schools and evaluation director Martin West. These data will provide a useful contrast of the development of student skills in the Ascend model and in more traditional “no excuses” charter schools.

Finally, in order to assess student, parent, and teacher school satisfaction at Ascend schools, the researchers will use aggregate data from NYC school surveys to compare perceptions of Ascend schools to perceptions of the schools that lottery losers attend.

Evaluation products and plan. The evaluation will generate multiple products. First, the evaluation team will report findings annually (at least) to Ascend over the grant period. Second, they will produce an interim public report after year three of the grant period and a final report at the end of year five. The evaluators will also seek to disseminate the results of these reports to the field through presentations to academic and practitioner conferences, at least one paper in a peer-reviewed journal, and additional publications designed to reach a broader audience. The table below outlines the evaluation plan.

External evaluation timeline and deliverables

	Data collection	Deliverables
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and link NYDOE administrative data with Ascend data on lottery results Secure teacher and student consent to 	Report to Ascend on implementation fidelity and student test score impacts after one year

	complete questionnaires on non-cognitive skills and school perceptions	
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer teacher and student surveys on non-cognitive skills and school perceptions • Collect test-score data from NYDOE and Ascend • Collect non-cognitive skills data from Boston Charter Research Collaborative 	<p>Report to Ascend on student non-cognitive skills, school perceptions, and test scores after two years</p> <p>Academic conference presentation of interim results for above outcomes</p>
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer teacher and student surveys on non-cognitive skills and school perceptions • Collect test-score data from NYDOE and Ascend • Collect non-cognitive skills data from Boston Charter Research Collaborative 	Interim public report: Impacts on student non-cognitive skills, school perceptions, and test scores after three years
Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer teacher and student surveys on non-cognitive skills and school perceptions • Collect high school graduation data • Collect test-score data from NYDOE and Ascend • Collect non-cognitive skills data from Boston Charter Research Collaborative 	<p>Report to Ascend on graduation rates, student non-cognitive skills, school perceptions, and test scores after four years</p> <p>Academic conference presentation of interim results for above outcomes</p>
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis • Writing 	Public final report: Impacts on high school graduation, non-cognitive skills, school perceptions, and test scores

Evaluation staff. Martin West, associate professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, will serve as the co-principal investigator and director of the evaluation. West is also a faculty research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research and deputy director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at Harvard’s Kennedy School, where the evaluation will be based. West studies the politics of K-12 education in the U.S. and how education policies affect student learning and non-cognitive development and has led multiple evaluations for grantees of the federal Investing in Innovation program.

PEPG Director Paul E. Peterson, the Henry Lee Shattuck professor of government at Harvard University, will serve as co-principal investigator. Peterson has extensive experience using randomized-control trials to evaluate the impact of school choice interventions on participating students. The research team will also include two postdoctoral research fellows at PEPG, Beth Schueler and Albert Cheng.

IX. SELECTION CRITERIA (D)—QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN AND PERSONNEL

(1) Adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks (also fulfills Application Requirement (I)).

Ascend is well-positioned to achieve the project objectives on time and on budget. Ascend has a track record of successfully launching and managing nine school campuses (under five charters), an experienced team with clearly defined responsibilities, and detailed timelines for achieving the milestones of the project.

Ascend currently holds five K-12 charters that designate the expansion of each school by one grade each year (until the full complement of grades is reached) and the creation of new campuses at the middle school and high school levels. Ascend is currently in the process of applying for two new charters from SUNY CSI, herein identified as Ascend Charter Schools #1 and #2. In years 2 and 3 of the grant, Ascend will apply for additional charters from SUNY CSI for Ascend Charter Schools #3, #4, and #5.

Until June 30, 2016, each of the existing Ascend charter schools operated with its own board of trustees. On July 1, 2016, as approved by vote of the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (SUNY CSI) and the New York State Board of Regents, all schools merged into one education

corporation under the authority of SUNY CSI; the individual schools' boards merged into a new entity—the Ascend Charter Schools Board of Trustees (the Trustees). The Trustees, including a parent representative, have experience as educators, philanthropists, real estate and human resource professionals, business leaders, attorneys, and community members.

Upon receipt of a charter, Ascend enters into a multiyear management agreement (typically three years) with the Trustees, who are ultimately accountable to the authorizer for the achievement of the goals and compliance measures outlined in the charter agreement. The Trustees are responsible for the schools and for managing and evaluating Ascend. At monthly meetings of the Trustees, Ascend and the school directors report on the schools' progress toward academic performance goals; cultural matters of note at each school; curriculum development, implementation, and revisions; student and talent recruitment; funding opportunities; legislative affairs; and financial stability and health. The Ascend school board is deeply engaged and invested in the ongoing success of the network.

CSP project timelines and milestones

Ascend's five-year growth plan is reflected in the chart on page 4-5 in the introduction to the Selection Criteria. Our key milestones over the course of the project follow this yearly plan, with more specific activities to take place over the course of each year as outlined below.

When opening a new campus of an existing charter school or opening an entirely new charter school, Ascend has identified three phases of start-up activities over the course of the year before opening:

- **Phase 1 (9-12 months from opening):** recruitment of start-up staff (beginning with the school director, who may be sourced from Ascend's pool of Resident Directors); community engagement and outreach; facilities identification; and financial systems set-up.

- **Phase 2 (6-9 months from opening):** start-up team including a new school's director of operations in place for new schools; continued student, leadership team, and staff recruitment; student recruitment and student lottery conducted; ordering of supplies; contractual agreement on lease/purchase of facility.
- **Phase 3 (3-6 months from opening):** student records secured, including special education records; class lists finalized; staff recruitment continues; facility renovation undertaken, as needed; final budget presented and approved by school board.
- **Phase 4 (1-3 months from opening):** pre-opening professional development; facilities fully equipped with technology, furniture, curricular materials, and supplies; operations team in place; school and facility readiness to open confirmed.

Below is a detailed timeline of key milestones Ascend will meet over the course of the CSP project in order to open new campuses and schools on time and on budget, ready to deliver a high-quality education to every child who enrolls.

- **Jan-June 2017:** engage in Phase 2 and Phase 3 start-up activities for Canarsie Ascend Middle School campus in preparation for opening in fall 2017 (Phase 1 is already complete); new Ascend Charter Schools #1 and #2 applications approved by SUNY CSI.
- **Summer 2017:** family engagement activities at all schools; Summer Institute professional development for all school leaders and teachers; Phase 4 start-up activities for Canarsie Ascend Middle School campus.
- **Fall 2017:** grade expansion at Brooklyn Ascend, Brownsville Ascend, Bushwick Ascend, and Central Brooklyn Ascend; launch of new Canarsie Ascend Middle School campus; Phase 1 start-up activities for Brownsville Ascend High School and Central Brooklyn Ascend Middle School campus openings and new ACS #1 and #2 school openings in fall 2018.

- **Jan-June 2018:** Phase 2 and Phase 3 start-up activities for Brownsville Ascend High School and Central Brooklyn Ascend Middle School new campus openings, as well as new ACS #1 and #2 school openings; new Ascend Charter School #3 application approved by SUNY CSI.
- **Summer 2018:** family engagement activities at all schools; Summer Institute professional development for all school leaders and teachers; Phase 4 school start-up activities for Brownsville Ascend High School, Central Brooklyn Ascend Middle School, new ACS #1 and ACS #2.
- **Fall 2018:** grade expansion at Brooklyn Ascend, Bushwick Ascend, and Canarsie Ascend; launch of Brownsville Ascend High School and Central Brooklyn Ascend Middle School campuses; opening of new ACS #1 and new ACS #2; Phase 1 start-up activities for new Bushwick Ascend High School campus and new ACS #3 openings in fall 2019.
- **Jan-June 2019:** Phase 2 and Phase 3 start-up activities for Bushwick Ascend High School and new ACS #3 school openings; new Ascend Charter School #4 and #5 applications approved by SUNY CSI.
- **Summer 2019:** family engagement activities at all schools; Summer Institute professional development for all school leaders and teachers; Phase 4 start-up activities for Bushwick Ascend High School campus and new ACS #3 openings.
- **Fall 2019:** grade expansion at Brownsville Ascend, Canarsie Ascend, and Central Brooklyn Ascend, new ACS #1, and new ACS #2; opening of Bushwick Ascend High School campus and new ACS #3; Phase 1 start-up activities commence for new ACS #4 and #5 openings in fall 2020.
- **Jan-June 2020:** Phase 2 and Phase 3 start-up activities for new ACS #4 and #5 openings.

- **Summer 2020:** family engagement activities at all schools; Summer Institute professional development for all school leaders and teachers; Phase 4 start-up activities for new ACS #4 and #5 openings.
- **Fall 2020:** grade expansion at Brownsville Ascend, Bushwick Ascend, Canarsie Ascend, Central Brooklyn Ascend, new ACS #1, new ACS #2, and new ACS #3; opening of Bushwick Ascend High School campus and new ACS #4 and #5; Phase 1 start-up activities for new Canarsie Ascend High School campus in fall 2021.
- **Jan-June 2021:** Phase 2 and Phase 3 start-up activities for Canarsie Ascend High School campus.
- **Summer 2021:** family engagement activities at all schools; Summer Institute professional development for all school leaders and teachers; Phase 4 start-up activities for Canarsie Ascend High School campus.
- **Fall 2021:** grade expansion at Bushwick Ascend, Canarsie Ascend, Central Brooklyn Ascend, new ACS #1, new ACS #2, new ACS #3, new ACS #4, and new ACS #5; opening of Bushwick Ascend High School campus.

Roles and responsibilities (also fulfills Application Requirements (f) and (g))

In the Ascend K-12 model, each new school opens with kindergarten and first grade and adds a grade each year through grade 12. In some instances, students from the eighth grades of two Ascend schools may attend ninth grade at one high school campus to achieve school efficiencies in the first year of operation. Lower school campuses (served by a school director and leadership team) comprise grades K-4; middle school campuses (served by their own school directors and leadership teams) comprise grades 5-8. High school campuses comprise grades 9-12 and are also served by their own school directors and leadership teams.

School governance and daily operations. Composed of a school director, deans of instruction, deans of students, and a director of operations, school leadership teams manage school campuses on a day-to-day basis, including: effective implementation of the Ascend educational model; the relationship with parents and the community; school culture and student discipline; the daily supervision, development, and evaluation of the faculty and other staff; daily academic operations, including academic pacing and student groupings, grade-level team meetings, assessments, and report cards; and, together with the network talent team, yearly talent recruitment efforts and ongoing professional development, including individualized professional development plans for teachers and corrective action plans, where necessary. The deans of students, deans of instruction, and director of operations all report to the school director, who reports to an Ascend managing director, who manages two to four schools and in turn reports to Ascend's chief schools officer. The chief schools officer informs the Ascend Charter Schools Board of Trustees of school director evaluation and performance.

Oversight. Ascend and the Trustees review the rich data provided by benchmark and interim assessments as predictors of year-end results on annual state tests, analyzing these to inform their decisions about curricular modifications and school design. Ascend reports to the Trustees monthly on academic measures as well as key operational indices, such as enrollment, attendance, disciplinary actions (including suspensions), FRPL, Black/Hispanic, ELL, and special education enrollment, and financial performance. Monthly, Ascend and/or the school directors highlight variances to unaudited monthly financial statements as well as annual audited statements prepared by auditors independently engaged by the Trustees and elaborate upon their implications and the schools' planned responses.

Instructional management. At Ascend schools, rigorous and frequent classroom observations and regular use of data facilitate close evaluation of students’ progress and, by extension, teachers’ performance. Ascend leaders take immediate action, using pre-defined interventions, to bolster teacher effectiveness whenever instruction is found lacking; all school and network staff are evaluated formally at mid-year and again at year’s end. In the 2014-2015 school year, Ascend schools began using Infinite Campus and Illuminate DNA. These powerful tools enable school leaders to evaluate teaching and learning on a daily or weekly basis by individual student, group, class, or grade level.

At the network level, our team includes the following roles and responsibilities.

The Ascend officer team, led by Chief Executive Officer Steven Wilson, will have primary responsibility for implementing the replication and expansion plan for Ascend schools, aiming to meet the objectives and outcomes outlined in Selection Criteria (C)—Quality of the Evaluation Plan for the Proposed Project. A member of the officer team, CSP Project Director and Chief Financial Officer Andrew Epstein will manage all compliance matters and ensure that project milestones are achieved on time and on budget. In the next six months, to help guide and implement Ascend’s growth plan, the officer team will be expanding from five to seven officers (six reporting to the chief executive officer) with the hiring of a chief talent officer and chief operating officer. See job descriptions for these two new officer roles and an organization chart in Appendix I: Additional Information.

The Ascend Learning Board of Directors (the Board) is comprised of seasoned educators and business leaders who will review and approve key decisions and outcomes for the Ascend charter management organization, including Ascend’s short- and long-term growth plans. The Board will review Ascend’s replication and expansion plans on an annual basis.

The schools team is led by Chief Schools Officer Brandon Sorlie, who has been with Ascend since 2008, served as a school director, and now oversees three managing directors who each support several school directors. (See Appendix I for the structure of the schools team.) Once a new school is approved, the Ascend schools and talent teams begin the effort of identifying a talented, seasoned school director deeply aligned with the Ascend mission and design, either from inside or outside the network. The schools team will also make sure existing schools prepare for yearly expansion by grade, and that founding leadership teams have the capacity to open new campuses and schools that perform at a high level from their first year.

Currently led by Chief Financial Officer Andrew Epstein, the Ascend operations team has a director of network operations, who manages a small network-based team that provides shared services to the schools, and a director of school operations, who oversees directors of operations and their teams at all the schools. The Ascend operations team will be responsible for logistical activities required to expand and open a new campus or school, including overseeing student recruitment and enrollment, arranging food and transportation services, procuring furniture, supplies and materials, and other important non-instructional school needs.

Led by President Susan Pollock, who has extensive experience overseeing large-scale development projects, the Ascend real estate and planning team will lead the strategic planning for all expansions and replications, preparing charter applications for new charters, and managing the school's relationship with its authorizer. This team will also source potential school sites and manage the process of acquiring and/or leasing facilities, engaging professionals to design renovations that serve the schools' needs in attractive, inspiring physical spaces;

bidding out and selecting general contractors; and arranging financing for renovation projects. Once a site has been leased and renovated, the team will manage ongoing maintenance.

Currently led by our Chief Executive Officer Steven Wilson until the hiring of a chief talent officer, the Ascend talent function includes talent recruitment, talent development, and human resources. The talent team's goal is to attract, recruit, train, and retain a talented staff at all of our schools and our network office. As part of its sustainable operating model, Ascend has a robust plan for growing talent in-house through its Resident Director program, where promising deans and outside candidates spend a year shadowing an experienced school director before applying to lead a school themselves, and the Ascend Teaching Fellowship program, where recent college graduates train under a mentor teacher for a year before taking over their own classrooms. Starting every fall, the talent recruitment team works closely with both existing schools as they expand by a grade level and new campuses and schools as they plan to open the following July to identify staff needs and employ best-in-class approaches to screen, interview, and make offers to staff in collaboration with the school director. Once hired, the talent development team collaborates with schools to provide ongoing professional development opportunities, from summer institutes for leaders and teachers to weekly grade-level Teacher Planning and Development meetings to school- and network-wide workshops.

The human resources team develops and manages Ascend's performance management model, including planning organizational and individual goals, assessing performance, developing professional skills, and recognizing contributions that advance Ascend's mission. In addition, the HR team will oversee HR programs and benefits, manage the employee lifecycle from onboarding to exit, and ensure that management and employee actions, as well as HR

functions, are consistent with applicable laws and regulations and Ascend's fiscal policies and procedures.

Other network teams include Ascend's curriculum, data and analysis, finance, technology, student support services, and communications and development teams, which all play important roles in supporting the above teams and the schools teams as they prepare to expand existing schools and open new campuses and schools.

(2) Qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, chief executive officer, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Ascend's team has broad and deep experience in the successful planning, opening, and managing of high-performing schools, as well as in related areas of organizational and network-wide sustainability such as strong financial management, fundraising, and marketing. The key individuals involved in planning and executing Ascend's CSP expansion and replication plan are the five highly experienced Ascend Learning officers, including CSP Project Director and Chief Financial Officer Andrew Epstein.

Steven F. Wilson, founder and chief executive officer of Ascend Learning, brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in urban school reform as a social entrepreneur, researcher and author, and policymaker. Prior to founding Ascend in 2007, Wilson spent three years as a senior fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government researching innovative school designs developed and implemented by education and charter management organizations. He published his findings in his book, *Learning on the Job: When Business Takes on Public Schools* (Harvard University Press, 2006) and related papers, which gave rise to the Ascend Learning model. Wilson previously served as executive vice president for product

development for Edison Schools (now Edison Learning), and founded and led Advantage Schools, a charter school management company. His first book, *Reinventing the Schools: A Radical Plan for Boston*, led to the establishment of the Massachusetts charter school law, which he wrote. Wilson is the board president of Building Excellent Schools (BES), a national training program for aspiring charter school founders and leaders, and a graduate of Harvard University.

President Susan Pollock is responsible for strategic growth planning; development, communications, and external affairs; authorizer reporting; school and network board work; and the development of facilities for schools in the Ascend network—including identifying candidate sites, negotiating leases with developers, securing financing, partnering with Ascend’s architects, and overseeing construction. Pollock came to Ascend from CPC Resources (CPCR), the development arm of the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC), where she served most recently as senior vice president, large-scale projects, a role that encompassed significant matters of long-term planning, communications, and legislative and external affairs. At CPC and CPCR, Pollock held a wide variety of positions encompassing the main businesses of both the lending and development organizations. Pollock oversaw the financing of thousands of affordable housing units throughout New York City; spearheaded a successful financing program aimed at stabilizing the city's troubled coop market in the 1990s; and acted as developer on hundreds of units of moderate-income, for-sale housing. Pollock attended Harvard College and graduate school in city and regional planning at University of California, Berkeley.

Andrew Epstein, Ascend’s chief financial officer and CSP project director, will oversee the CSP project and all Ascend financial matters, including financial policies and planning, budgeting, accounting, regulatory compliance and financial reporting, payroll, employee benefits, insurance, equipment leasing, purchasing systems and controls, and together with

Pollock, real estate borrowing. **Epstein has experience managing federal funding and related compliance requirements, including Ascend's Title funding and school food program funding, both Federal funds administered by New York State. Epstein has eight years of experience in the charter management space.** Before joining Ascend, Epstein worked closely with the network in his role as a consultant at Charter School Business Management (CSBM), a highly respected organization that provides technical support with all aspects of non-academic school responsibilities. Before joining CSBM, Epstein served as senior director of finance at Democracy Prep Public Schools, a network of high-performing charter schools. Epstein attended the University of Michigan and received his MBA from Columbia University.

Ascend's chief curriculum and innovation officer Elizabeth Schmidt and chief schools officer Brandon Sorlie drive the schools' academic performance and will ensure all school staff and leaders are adequately trained in Ascend's rigorous liberal arts curriculum. Schmidt began her work with Ascend Learning in 2011 and designed Ascend's ambitious humanities curriculum, and led the development of Ascend's new Common Core-aligned liberal arts curriculum. She previously taught literature and writing at The Children's Storefront School in Harlem; The New School; Sarah Lawrence College; and Barnard College, Columbia University. Schmidt has published poetry, journalism, and scholarship on American and world literature in literary and academic publications. Schmidt has a Ph.D. in American literature from New York University and a B.A. in English from Wesleyan University.

Brandon Sorlie leads Ascend's schools team, which offers a wide range of instructional and cultural support to Ascend schools. Sorlie and his team are responsible for managing and coaching the school directors, strengthening the implementation of Ascend's educational model, and managing the effectiveness of the full line structure of all Ascend schools. Formerly school

director of Brooklyn Ascend Lower School, Sorlie has been with the network since its inception in 2008. Before joining Ascend, Sorlie was responsible for faculty coaching and evaluation, student assessment, and data analysis at a public school in the Bronx, New York. A graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, he holds two master's degrees, one from Pace University and one from Teachers College at Columbia University. More information on our network leadership can be found in Appendix B—Resumes/Curriculum Vitae.

(3) The ability of the applicant to sustain the operation of the replicated or expanded charter schools after the grant has ended, as demonstrated by the multi-year financial and operating model included in the applicant's response to Application Requirement (g) (also fulfills Application Requirements (g) and (l)).

Ascend's expansion and replication plan calls for the network to double in size from five to 10 K-12 charters, from nine to 19 school campuses, and from approximately 4,000 to more than 8,000 students by the end of the grant period. Ascend has experience growing its network while maintaining a high quality of instruction and operations across schools, having expanded from one school serving 210 children in 2008 to nine school campuses under five K-12 charters serving 3,962 children in the 2016-2017 school year.

Ascend's long-term financial model can be found in Appendix H: Supplemental Organizational Budgets and Financial Information. The CSP grant would guarantee Ascend's capacity to double in size in the next five years while keeping true to its mission of providing an excellent education to all students on the public dollar at scale. As Ascend opens and scales new grades, campuses, and K-12 charter schools, CSP funds will be used at the school level for: furniture, equipment, classroom libraries, curriculum materials, and Resident Directors. The CSP grant would also allow Ascend to scale its network office to support new campuses and schools

while they are still ramping up their student enrollment (and related management fees) in newer schools by providing resources for: curriculum development, leadership and expansion management, a teaching fellowship, and evaluation support.

Please refer to the Budget Narrative Form and Budget for a detailed description of how the grant funds will be used. After the end of the grant, Ascend will not have costs associated with resident school directors, start-up expenditures, or equipping scaling schools, which means the organization will be able to sustain individual schools on per pupil funding alone. After the CSP grant period, these costs will be funded by the increased per-pupil funds gained through higher enrollments at the school level and the attendant greater management fee totals at the Ascend network level.

Ascend's financial model has been built and refined over several years to create fiscally conservative budgets and projections for both schools and the central office. The budgets aim to ensure quality of program, strong fiscal health for current and future fiscal years, and a commitment to sustainability after a new charter's second full year in operation. Ascend's current schools and central office are all in excellent fiscal health: we have maintained balanced budgets (positive net income) in all years and annual audits were issued with unqualified (clean) opinions of our financial statements. Given our history of strong fiscal health, we feel confident that we can continue to maintain balanced budgets during and after the CSP grant period. Ascend has identified all other sources of federal funding and ensured that funding received through this program will not overlap with other funding received.

Ascend's CSP expansion and replication budget is approximately \$10.2 million over the five-year grant period. We developed the budget based on the varying needs of each current K-12 charter school as well as the needs of the central office. Ascend schools are funded primarily

through per-pupil operating funds provided by New York State. The majority of each school's revenue goes towards Ascend's most critical resource—talented educators—including teachers, deans, school directors, and operations personnel. Most proposed CSP funding will be used to support curricular materials, technology, furniture, food service, facilities, and a host of other operational expenses as well as key school and network leadership staff who will be planning, driving, and managing the organization's growth and long-term sustainability

School-level financial sustainability. CSP money will be used in existing schools to fund the purchasing of needed equipment and supplies for newly added grades, as well as for a Resident Director in the pre-opening planning years of new K-12 charters. This approach allows per pupil revenue and philanthropy to be maximized in these critical early years of the school. Existing Ascend charters have historically relied on the fiscal strength of more fully enrolled school campuses in the same charter and (minimal) philanthropy channeled through the CMO in order to fill funding gaps associated with starting and scaling new school campuses. Ascend is moving to support these existing charters through CSP funds in order to ensure long-term fiscal health for each charter as it grows. As new charters open, CSP funds and philanthropy will be leveraged to ensure each school campus reaches financial sustainability without an overreliance on the fiscal reserves of other schools within the charter. **New K-12 charters will leverage both CSP money and private philanthropy over the course of their planning years and their first and second years in operation until they reach sustainability with only public funding in the third full year of operation.** The goal is for schools to operate with 30 days cash on hand starting in their third year. At the end of the grant period in summer 2022, all of the schools outlined in our growth plan will have entered (or be entering) their third year of operation and be financially sustainable on per pupil funding.

Occupying private facilities as opposed to co-locating with district schools is an important part of Ascend’s business model as it permits school leadership teams to focus entirely on instruction and forging a school’s distinctive culture. Private facilities, designed with an eye toward achieving modern, bright, architecturally appealing spaces, also communicate the value we place on education, our high aspirations for our students, and our commitment to strive for excellence in all we do. The school financial model (discussed above) allows each school to pay up to 20 percent of its revenues for facility costs. In recent years, NYS legislation, which authorizes the reimbursement of rent expense for NYC charter school students “new” as of fall 2014 has greatly eased the rent burden on school budgets.

Network office financial sustainability. Each school pays Ascend a management fee, averaging 12.9 percent across the schools in the current fiscal year, of the school’s basic revenues (general education operating funds plus IDEA) for the services Ascend provides to the school. The management fee covers designing, selecting, acquiring, and implementing the Ascend educational program and curriculum, including special education and ELL services and programs; designing and delivering professional development programs; designing assessments and academic data analysis systems; recruiting and training the schools’ leaders, teachers, and staff; recruiting and enrolling students; communications and fundraising; authorizer reporting and compliance; building and maintaining the schools’ facilities and technology systems; and managing the schools’ finances and procurements.

The Ascend network requires both CSP grant money and private philanthropy until all charter schools in our growth plan are at scale in order to provide critical support for schools, including the functions described above. Additionally, the network will continue to build its fund reserve to ensure the long-term fiscal health of the network and schools as it manages and

prepares for the inevitable capital repair costs at facilities. Since inception, Ascend has partnered with and plans to continue to partner with (both during and after the period of the grant): the Achelis and Bodman Foundation, the Calder Foundation, Propel Capital, and the Charter School Growth Fund. Ascend will continue to build relationships with foundations and individuals that have interest and capacity to support special projects and supplemental programming as we continue to scale after the end of the grant period.

To illustrate the broad support Ascend enjoys from a variety of stakeholders, please see the attached letters of support in Appendix C—Letters of Support from: Ascend Learning Board Chair Marty Linsky, Charter School Growth Fund Chief Executive Officer Kevin Hall, State University of New York Charter Schools Institute Executive Deputy Director Ralph Rossi, New York City Department of Education Senior Executive Director of School Design and Charter Partnerships Melissa Harris, and Councilman Rafael Espinal (representing the 37th District in Brooklyn).

Ascend will continue its growth plan after the period of the grant ends, with central office teams increasing capacity as the number of schools and their needs expand during the timeline of the grant. The network will achieve economies of scale and efficiencies that allow the fees to stay equal to or lower than what is currently charged.

X. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Appendix E responds to Application Requirement (a). The project narrative above fulfills Application Requirements (b) to (l). For Application Requirement (m), Ascend requires no waivers of Federal statutory or regulatory requirements to operate its replicated or expanded charter schools.