



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Achievement Academy Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2006-2007

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INTRODUCTION

Background on Charter Schools and the State University

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts; schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees which is directly responsible for school performance. That board, while independent, is subject to public oversight. Just as traditional school boards, charter school boards of trustees must adhere to New York State’s Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools and their boards are also subject to oversight and monitoring. In the case of SUNY authorized schools, that monitoring is conducted by the Institute. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its Accountability Plan, as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness within the charter period, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

The State University Trustees’ Oversight Process

The State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education

Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan (which is contained in the schools' charter itself) and other methods.

In addition to monitoring a school's compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals.

The first goal is to facilitate improvement. By providing substantive information about the school's strengths and weaknesses to the school's board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school to recognize those strengths and weaknesses. Of course, whether the school actually takes corrective actions, and more importantly, effective corrective action, remains the school's responsibility given that it is an independent and autonomous school.

The second goal is to disseminate information about the school's performance beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. Ideally this information, including the present report, should help parents make choices about whether a school is serving their children well and/or is likely to continue to do so in the future. For this reason, this report (and others like it) is posted on the Institute's website and the school is asked to inform parents of its posting. By providing parents with more information, the State University hopes to enhance the market accountability to which charters are subject: if they do not attract and retain sufficient numbers of students who want the product they are providing, they cannot survive.

The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a database of the school's progress over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute is better able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school—and the likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute and the State University Trustees are better positioned to make recommendations and a decision on whether a school's charter should be renewed. In turn, a school will also have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

Inspection Visits and Reports¹

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. This inspection report is a product of one of those visits.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit ("the Renewal Benchmarks"). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

¹ More information on the Institute's school oversight and evaluation system may be found online at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsPubsReports.htm>.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. This subset, Renewal Benchmarks 1.B-1.F, is often referred to as the "Qualitative Education Benchmarks," or "QEBs." In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the QEBs are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's 3rd - 8th grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily limited and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.²

Over time, and particularly at the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1.A, the school's progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the Qualitative Education Benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

This inspection report includes a review of academic attainment and improvement based on the school's performance on state and other assessments. The School Performance Review provides an evaluation of the school's academic achievement in the context of Renewal Benchmark 1A. Because of the timing of the release of state assessment data, the review is based on test results from the school year preceding the date of the school visit upon which the evidence for the Qualitative Education Benchmarks is based.³ The narrative refers to School Performance Summaries which follow the School Performance Review section. These one page summaries present a synopsis of the Accountability Plan outcome measures in English language arts and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures in their first year of operation:⁴

- Measure 1 (absolute) shows the grade level and aggregate performance on the state test of both all students and students enrolled in at least their second year.
- Measure 2 (absolute) presents the school's Performance Index (PI) measured against the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system. The PI is derived by adding together the percentage of students at Levels 2 and above and the percentage at Levels 3 and above.

² More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

³ Not all schools will have state test results because the state only administers tests in certain grades: state English language arts and mathematics tests are administered to grades 3-8, science tests in grades 4 and 8, and social studies tests in grades 5 and 8.

⁴ In indicating whether a performance measure has been met, the summaries only present a strict, narrow accounting; they do not show whether the school came close to meeting a measure or the relative weight of each measure for gauging student progress.

- Measure 3 (comparative) compares the performance of charter school students enrolled in at least their second year to all students in the same tested grades in the local school district. For instance, a grades 5-8 charter school would compare only its grades 6-8 results to the same tested grades in the district because students in its 5th grade were only in their first year at the charter school.
- Measure 4 (comparative) compares the actual overall performance of the school to the predicted level of performance of similar schools statewide using a regression analysis based on free lunch statistics. The Effect Size is a statistical measure calculated by dividing the difference between the actual and predicted outcomes by the standard deviation difference.
- Measure 5 (value added) shows both the number of grade level cohorts that achieved their target as well as the overall performance of all cohort students combined. If the baseline is above 50 NCE, then the target is an increase of any amount.

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and inspection report, which all schools in that position receive.

As such, each of the Institute's inspection reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school. This chart is set forth in the following section.

The Present Report

The information contained within this report is the result of evidence obtained during the Institute's visit to the school conducted in the spring of the school's second year of instruction of its first or second charter term. In addition to this introduction, the report includes a brief description of the school, conclusions and analysis from the present visit, the Renewal Benchmarks, and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the school inspectors and the date of the visit.

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two- to four-member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute's evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment) and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating

to student health and safety it may take additional and immediate action; however, monitoring compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit. The same is true with issues pertaining to the fiscal soundness of the school. Evaluation visits typically include an interview with the school board, the school leader, classroom visitations, in addition to the review of other school-based documents.

Keeping this Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State University and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are valid, in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school's academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use the inspection team's conclusions in planning school improvement efforts.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the inspection team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but

significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the inspection team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed *brutal honesty* is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Achievement Academy Charter School (“Achievement Academy”) was approved by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York in June 2004. After taking the 2004-2005 school year as a planning year, the school opened in September 2005 with an initial enrollment of 60 students in grade five. The school was located at 1 Dudley Heights in Albany, New York, sharing facility space with KIPP Tech Valley Charter School. The school’s original plan, as stated in its charter application, calls for the addition of one grade level per year for a grade range of 5 through 8 by 2008-2009. The school moved into a new facility, located at 42 South Dove Street in Albany, prior to the start of the 2005-06 school year and added grade six. The school shares its current location on Dove Street with Albany Community Charter School.

The board of trustees of Achievement Academy partners with Achievement First, Inc., a non-profit entity formed by the leaders of Amistad Academy in New Haven, Connecticut, in an effort to replicate the success of the Amistad school. Achievement First, Inc. provides an array of educational services, but does not fill an operational or management role for the school.⁵

Achievement Academy Charter School’s mission statement is as follows:

The mission of the Achievement Academy Charter School is to produce in young people the academic excellence and responsible public citizenship that will propel them to success in high school, college and their chosen careers. A rigorous, standards-based, college-preparatory curriculum and design will be implemented to accelerate student learning and achievement. Student academic performance, especially in reading, writing, math, and public citizenship, will be tracked using measurable outcomes and skills assessment. Public citizenship will be a cornerstone of learning by instilling in students the values of Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard Work from the character program, “REACH,” so that students take responsibility for themselves, their school and their community.

Key design elements as outlined in the school’s initial charter application include:

- a relentless focus on achieving dramatic, measurable results in student academic performance; and on ensuring that all students understand and master learning the standards;
- achievement-focused, standards-based training that fosters a belief in and commitment to measurable outcomes;
- the development and coaching of teachers to facilitate and lead curriculum implementation;
- the periodic use of standards-based assessments, given in 6-week cycles, to inform instruction around student mastery of clear standards and cumulative retention of standards;

⁵ A full description of the Amistad model and the school’s service agreement with Achievement First, Inc. is set forth in the school’s Charter Agreement on file at the Charter Schools Institute.

- English language arts being taught two to three hours daily, focusing on comprehension, grammar, organization and writing; students reading more than 50 books annually; and a corrective reading program for students behind in their progress;
- behavioral expectations consistently explained and reinforced, with emphasis on the observable “REACH” behaviors of Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard Work;
- morning circle time daily to affirm school values and behavior expectations in class and to recognize student behavior and achievement through a rating and award system;
- longer school days with afternoon tutoring and summer intervention programs necessary for struggling students; and,
- a Parent Leadership Council that involves parents in a structured way with the school leadership and activities.

School Year (2006-2007)

210 days⁶

School Day (2006-2007)

7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.⁷

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁸	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2004-05	Planning Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2005-06	75	75	60	5	5	5	YES
2006-07	150	150	145	5-6	5-6	5-6	YES
2007-08	225	225		5-7	5-7		
2008-09	300	300		5-8	5-8		

⁶ Up to 15 of the 210 days annually will be scheduled in July for incoming students in need of remediation and is referred to as the Summer School Institute. Additionally, the school reduced its calendar by 2 full days for the 2005-2006 school year.

⁷ 7:30 a.m. to 7:55 a.m. is used as a breakfast/homeroom time period. Students are released at 1:45 p.m. on Fridays to allow for staff development.

⁸ Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the SED 2005-2006 database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, cited the same enrollment total of 60 students.

Race/Ethnicity	2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	1	1.7%
Black (Not Hispanic)	54	90.0%
Hispanic	4	6.7%
White	1	1.7%

Source: NYSED 2005-06 Database

Free/Reduced Lunch	2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	44	73.3%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	6	10.0%

Source: NYSED 2005-06 Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1 st Year	2004-05	Planning Year	NO		NONE
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2005-06	1 st	YES	Prior Action Visit, End-of-Year Letter	NONE
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2006-07	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Report	

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS EVALUATION VISIT

In March of 2006, the Charter Schools Institute conducted the first end-of-year school inspection visit to Achievement Academy Charter School. At the time of that visit, the school was found to have devoted a great deal of time toward building its school culture. The school had established rituals such as morning circle, and a viable “Scholar Dollar” student discipline system. Students adhered to the school’s REACH (Respect, Enthusiasm, Attitude, Concern, Hard Work) values, and teachers held generally consistent behavior expectations for students.

During the visit, elements of the academic program pertaining to curriculum, pedagogy and staff development had been marginally established. Internal assessments were, for the most part, used by the principal to evaluate teachers’ instructional strengths and identify gaps in the curriculum. Differentiated instruction for individual students was not occurring, and the low level of student performance on internal assessments indicated insufficient preparation of students for future success on the New York state assessments. In addition, teachers were given limited formative feedback about the quality of their instruction and how they might improve their pedagogical skills. Under these circumstances, teachers were generally not aware of the fact that their teaching skills needed adjustment.

The curriculum in use was developed by Achievement First and supported by School Performance, Inc. (SPI) which aligned the curriculum to the New York state standards. Teachers at that time were required to submit lesson plans. However, there was no standard template or formative feedback regarding the lesson plans, and the quality was found to vary widely. The school inspection team questioned whether some of the variation might be attributable to the lack of scope and sequence materials customized by subject area.

At the end of the school’s first year, instructional time had been eliminated in science and social studies in favor of supplemental mathematics and English language arts instruction. The writing curriculum was neither comprehensive nor rigorous. Concerns were raised by Institute staff about the curtailing of subjects (social studies and science) that provide students with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills.

Students in the fifth grade, the school’s only grade last year, were divided into homogeneous ability groups based on their performance on the Terra Nova assessments given very early in the school year. The groups consisted of high, medium and low ability levels, with the lowest group containing a majority of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). While classroom management practices were evident to some extent, the content-specific teaching did not appear rigorous or engaging. Professional development and supervision of first-year teachers emphasized the development and establishment of a school culture, with classroom coaching and delivery of subject specific curriculum taking a lower priority.

At the time of the March 2006 visit, the school was under enrolled with only fifty applications for the next year’s class of seventy-five. It was noted that over time continued low enrollment could erode the financial viability of the school.

In its follow-up letter to the school, the Institute acknowledged that the school had built a quality culture of high behavioral and academic expectations, but needed to focus on the day-to-day quality of the instruction and lesson plans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the present second end-of-year visit to Achievement Academy Charter School on February 27, 2007. Inspectors visited classrooms, reviewed documents and interviewed instructional and administrative staff. The team's conclusions are summarized below. The evidence base and further analysis is contained in the Benchmark Analysis and Evidence section of this report.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

As 2005-06 was the school's first year of operation, test results for the 5th grade serve as baseline information for the charter period. Students performed at low levels in both English language arts and mathematics. The school did not yet have testing grades in science in 2005-06; its 5th grade students performed well in social studies.

Curriculum and Instruction

While the school's curriculum has been aligned to New York State Standards, the school's English language arts and mathematics curriculum lacks scope and sequence and pacing guides. At the time of the inspection visit, the school had recently hired (November 2006) an instructional coach to review lesson plans, provide curriculum support and to help teachers improve their pedagogical skills. A new day-to-day school wide schedule had recently been put in place (mid-February 2007), but had not yet been internalized with administrators, teachers or students, and as such the school's day-to-day rituals and routines appeared fragile. In addition, teacher turnover remained a chronic problem which, among other things, hinders the school's ability to implement its academic and behavioral programs with consistency.

School Structure

Achievement Academy instituted a new horizontal organizational structure and also recently reconfigured the school's organizational structure to ensure teachers were teaching in their area(s) of competency. In addition, the school had engaged the services of a (part-time) instructional coach who worked with teachers in their classrooms.

Teacher Retention

Teacher turnover hinders the school's ability to implement its academic and behavioral programs with the necessary consistency. As Achievement Academy heads into its third year, the school will want to ensure that it has in place a stable workforce of teachers who truly hold high expectations for all students.

Use of Assessment

Internal assessments developed by School Performance, Inc. are given at six-week intervals and the TerraNova test is used with incoming fifth grade students to determine their baseline academic performance. While the interval assessments are aligned to New York State standards and the school's curriculum, it also permits an analysis of specific and individual areas of academic weakness. However, at the time of the inspection visit, the school was not using data to drive or modify classroom instruction.

Professional development

A professional development session is scheduled weekly after students are dismissed at 1:00 p.m. on Fridays. While teachers generally found professional development worthwhile, some teachers stated

that the professional coaching within the confines of their classroom would be the most beneficial to them for their professional development. At this point there is neither a strategic plan for professional development nor an individualized professional development plan for each teacher.

Student Order and Discipline

There was a consistent approach (Scholar Dollar system) to student behavior management observed school-wide. Students appeared well versed in the school's REACH (Respect, Enthusiasm, Attitude, Concern, Hard Work) values. However, a significant amount of attention during classroom time was devoted to behavior management issues at the expense of academic engagement. The inspection team concluded that the school would benefit from fostering a scholarly school culture in which teachers and students can concentrate on teaching and learning.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The following review of academic attainment and improvement (Benchmark 1A) is based on assessment results and other data from the 2005-06 school year, Achievement Academy's first year of operation.

Summary: As 2005-06 was the school's first year of operation, data for the 5th grade serves as baseline information for the charter period. Students performed at low levels in both English language arts and mathematics. The school did not yet have testing grades in for science in 2005-06; its 5th grade students performed well in social studies.

English Language Arts: As 2005-06 was the school's first year of operation and no students had been enrolled for two or more years, no conclusions can be drawn regarding that measurement in the school's Accountability Plan. Thirty-six percent of all students in the 5th grade scored at the proficient level. The school did not meet the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) under the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system. It did not outperform the local school district and it performed considerably worse than predicted compared to similar schools statewide.

Mathematics: About one quarter (28 percent) of students achieved proficiency in mathematics on the state's 5th grade test in 2005-06. While the school did meet the AMO under the state's NCLB accountability system, it did not outperform the local school district or score higher than predicted in comparison to similar schools statewide.

Science: No testing grades yet.

Social Studies: Although this goal is not applicable until the school has an 8th grade, 86 percent of 5th grade students were proficient on the state exam in 2005-06. Comparison data for the local school district was unavailable.

No Child Left Behind: The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.

Optional Goals: None.

Note: The following two pages present School Performance Summaries that provide data addressing the required Accountability Plan outcome measures for English language arts and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures. Please refer to the "Inspection Visits and Reports" section of the Introduction of this report for full definitions of the measures used and details about the tables themselves.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Mathematics

Achievement Academy Charter School



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

ABSOLUTE MEASURES	2003-04			MET	2004-05			MET	2005-06			MET	
	Grades Served: None	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades Served: None	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		Grades Served: 5	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	8	4	(0)	(0)	8	4	(0)	(0)	3	(0)	(0)	--	
		8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		4	(0)		(0)
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	8	4			8	4			5	102	86	YES	
		8				8				5	27.7		46.3
COMPARATIVE MEASURES	Comparison: (Albany City Schools)	Grades	School	District	Comparison: (Albany City Schools)	Grades	School	District	Comparison: (Albany City Schools)	Grades	School	District	--
		4				4				5	27.7	46.3	
3. Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local district.	8	4			8	4			N	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	NO
		8				8				65	27.7	50.9	
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3).	Assessment:	Grades	Cohorts Making Target:		Assessment:	Grades	Cohorts Making Target:		Assessment:	Grades	Cohorts Making Target:		--
		NA	of			NA	of			NA	of		
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam.	Assessment:	N	Base	Target	Result	N	Base	Target	Result	N	Base	Target	Result

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Curriculum and Instruction

Achievement Academy Charter School's curriculum is based on materials produced by Achievement First, Inc. and School Performance Inc. (SPI). For the science curriculum the school uses the Full Option Science System (FOSS) in both grades and for the social studies curriculum Houghton-Mifflin is used in fifth grade and Teacher Curriculum Institute's Social Studies Alive! in sixth grade. There was no text for the writing program. Curricula outlines from Achievement First, Inc. and SPI aided the school in aligning its curriculum to the New York State standards. It was not clear to the inspection team that the curriculum was aligned grade-to-grade. The school's curriculum lacked mapping, scope and sequence documents and pacing guides in mathematics and English language arts. As a result, the curriculum did not fully support the efforts of teachers in day-to-day instruction.

At the time of the visit, teachers engaged students in whole group or independent practice activity and did not differentiate instruction according to the individual needs of students. Common lessons across three ability groups resulted in a lack of enrichment for high ability students and a lack of modifications, other than the pace of the lesson, for the lowest achieving group of students. The lowest level group and those with IEPs were supported by a special education teacher and/or aide who "pushed in" to the classroom.

In the majority of fifth and sixth grade classrooms, inspectors noted minimal time on task for the majority of students, weaknesses in teachers' content area knowledge, and that the questions asked by teachers were of a factual nature not requiring students to use higher order thinking skills. Most of the schools' teachers were novice teachers and, for the most part, lacked classroom management skills, which resulted in a reduction in the amount of class time devoted to academic instruction.

In addition, there was no time within the context of the regularly scheduled classes to re-teach concepts and skills missed on the six-week SPI interval assessments. In the future, the school hopes to strengthen its goal of re-teaching by refining teachers' lesson plans to make re-teaching more systematic and part of teachers' day-to-day pedagogy.

Although administrators and teachers spoke of "high expectations" for students in terms of academic performance, these expectations were not apparent to inspectors in classrooms, and inspectors found numerous instances when teaching was not sufficiently effective to enable students to meet high expectations. Inspection team members noted that teachers and administrators frequently referred to low achieving students' personal situations, such as a difficult home life and prior school circumstances as the basis for poor academic performance, rather than holding the adults to an unrelenting level of responsibility for improving their individual instructional skills and knowledge, and for encouraging student effort and academic confidence as the basis for developing student capacity and achievement. There did not seem to be a sense of urgency and focused communication about authentic, high expectations.

A new daily schedule added a tutoring session called Red Period tutoring to the instructional day. Red Period tutoring was designed specifically for students who show deficiency in certain skills and scored between 40-70 percent on their SPI interval test(s). Red Period tutoring groups were assembled by matching each student who was deficient in a particular skill to a teacher assigned to remediate that particular skill. Students were not matched with their classroom teachers. The inspection team questioned whether this design might undermine a sense of accountability by the

classroom teacher, and curtail the student-teacher rapport. Additionally, this configuration would seem to deprive teachers, particularly novice teachers, of opportunities to develop a more expansive repertoire of teaching skills.

Saturday School was also in place for those students who scored a 40 percent or lower on their SPI interval test(s). The two sessions that occurred in late November/December were not well attended by students. It remains to be seen how effective these programs will prove to be because of their relative newness (2/19/07) to the school's schedule and an inability to implement them with consistency due to teacher absences.

School Structure

Since November 2006, Achievement Academy has engaged the services of a (part-time) instructional coach who worked with teachers in their classrooms. The school's administration had also recently reconfigured the school's organizational structure to ensure teachers were teaching in their area(s) of competency. In addition, a new horizontal organizational structure had been instituted that placed the founding principal as head of the cultural arm of the school, and added two new positions: dean of academics-instruction and dean of academics-curriculum (at the same level) as head of the academic arm. Overseeing both aspects is a person in a new position of executive director who mentors *all* administrators from an out-of-state locale. The addition of the dean of academics-instruction and the dean of academics-curriculum resulted in an effort to improve teaching and learning at the school. New changes include a template for lesson plan development and a lesson plan submission process that includes a feedback loop to be used by teachers for guidance in improving their lesson plans. Other changes included daily tutoring sessions (included in the new daily schedule), school administrators meeting with teachers to inform them of their students' (interval) scores, weekly professional development sessions, and the evaluation of teachers with formative feedback.

It was difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes as they had only recently been instituted at the time of the inspection visit and, in addition, the changes had not yet been internalized with administrators, teachers or students and, as such, the school's newly instituted day-to-day rituals and routines appeared fragile.

Teacher Retention

Teacher turnover hinders the school's ability to implement its academic and behavioral programs with the necessary consistency. At the time of the inspection visit, only two full-time academic teachers (out of eight) remained from the beginning of the school year. The lowest ability fifth grade group had been taught by five teachers during the current academic year, not including substitute teachers and substitute administrators. One administrator stated: "Ongoing teacher turnover has hindered our ability to implement our program (behavior and academic)." While the school does not know its precise needs in terms of filling teacher vacancies for next year, at a minimum it will need to staff one class of 7th graders. Achievement Academy plans to use a teacher placement service and may shorten the school day (now 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) in the future to make the school more competitive and attractive for hiring and retaining new teachers.

As Achievement Academy heads into its third year, the school will want to ensure that it has in place a stable workforce of teachers who truly hold high expectations for all students.

Use of Assessment

At the time of the inspection visit, the school's administration and teaching staff were aware of the school's performance shortfalls in English language arts and mathematics in relation to the goals articulated in its Accountability Plan. In an effort to improve student performance, spreadsheets, developed by the new dean of academics-instruction showing SPI six week (interval) test score results with an accompanying item analysis were used in several ways in an effort to make *current* student achievement scores available to all stakeholders. The Administration hopes to encourage all school stakeholders to acknowledge the gap between current student scores and projected goals vis-à-vis the school's Accountability Plan. Additionally, the spreadsheet scores and item analysis function as a means to identify those students who are in need of remediation in a particular skill or concept and are then selected for the "Red Period" remediation. The (interval) scores are reviewed during professional development time and after the first Interval I test, for example administrators met with individual staff members for a data conference. One administrator said, "The school is working to learn to use test data to drive instruction, but we're not doing it well yet." One teacher said, "The SPI breakdown of results [will] allow me to re-teach what a student is deficient in, and it is even more helpful because of the item analysis breakdown for Red Period tutoring and Saturday school." A new teacher said, "It gives me the direction for what AIM/standard to meet."

Professional Development

The weekly professional development session is planned by school administrators so that every each professional development period will have some time devoted to addressing the school's culture and academic concerns. Specifically, offerings such as conflict resolution, systems, routines, data analysis, discipline and video clips of effective instruction from School Performance, Inc. had been integrated into the professional development program. Teachers reported that a significant amount of professional development time had been devoted to behavior management issues at the expense of focusing on teaching and learning. However, the recently hired teaching coach spent a majority of her time (three days at the school) in the classroom monitoring teacher instruction, supporting teachers with curriculum and reviewing lesson plans.

Student Order and Discipline

The administration and teachers at Achievement Academy were observed by visit inspectors to be consistent in their methods of molding student behavior with the school-wide use of the "Scholar Dollar" system in both the fifth and sixth grades. However, many teachers still struggled to keep control of their class with a significant amount of teacher time and attention devoted to behavioral issues at the expense of emphasis being placed on teaching and achieving instructional depth. There was a minimal amount of (student) time on task in a majority of classes in both fifth and sixth grade. Teachers, in their need for acceptable classroom behavior, use tools such as misbehavior "tickets" and "points" to inculcate desired student behavior as well as SLANT (Sit up straight, Lean forward, Act interested or ask questions, Nod, Take notes or Take notice) student reflection sheets and in some instances peer mediation. While the REACH (Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, Hard work) principles were uniformly displayed on bulletin boards in classrooms, teachers continually threatened to sanction students by giving them demerits. In one class, the teacher was still trying to establish order after thirty minutes. In another class the teacher said to the class, "I shouldn't hear any singing and I am just going to walk around with tickets." The appearance of some classrooms was disorderly with litter, notebooks, folders and journals strewn around.

APPENDIX: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1 English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.4 Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data	1B The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.
Benchmark 1C Curriculum	1C The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

<p>Benchmark 1D Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1 The school has strong instructional leadership.</p>
	<p>1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p>
<p>Benchmark 1E Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1E The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</p>
<p>Benchmark 1F Professional Development</p>	<p>1F The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.</p>

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second-Year Visit at Achievement Academy on February 27, 2007. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Susan Seymour (Team Leader) is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

Joanne Falinski, Ph.D., is the Vice President for Charter School Evaluation of the Charter Schools Institute at the State University of New York. She most recently served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Pace University, Pleasantville, NY. Her responsibilities included teaching both undergraduate and graduate education courses, supervising literacy practicum students in the field and conducting relevant research. She also presented at numerous regional and national conferences on topics of literacy, professional development and collaboration between special education and regular education. Dr. Falinski was actively involved in the University community, serving as a member of the Institutional Review Board and Writing Center Advisory Board. Prior to joining Pace, Dr. Falinski served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education for Manhattanville College and Director of a NYS site of the National Writing Project. Dr. Falinski's vast experience in the K-12 community includes serving as an Elementary Classroom Teacher and Elementary Principal.

Ron Miller, Ph.D., is the Vice President for Accountability of the Charter Schools Institute at the State University of New York. Dr. Miller formerly was the Educational Accountability Officer for the New York City Department of Education. After teaching grades three through five in New York City public schools for seven years, he joined the central offices of the New York City schools, where he conducted evaluative research and organizational studies. As Director of the Office of School Planning and Accountability, he worked with school leaders to develop their capacity to use data for school improvement. In this capacity he developed PASS, a school performance review system which was adopted in 600 city schools. Dr. Miller holds an AB degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology from Columbia University.

Jason L. Sarsfield is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute at the State University of New York. Mr. Sarsfield fulfills a leadership role in informal and annual visits to SUNY authorized charter schools as well as participates in the charter renewal review process, provides technical assistance to schools as needed, and contributes to the Institute's research agenda. Prior to joining the Institute in January, 2007 Mr. Sarsfield was a Contract Analyst at The Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University – Office of Academic Accountability where he was responsible for evaluating the academic performance of authorized schools, reviewing school curricula and educational program, and measuring progress toward educational goals. While at Central Michigan University, Mr. Sarsfield worked closely with the Michigan Department of Education on annual legislative reports, grant reviews, and policy recommendations. Previously, Mr. Sarsfield taught

social studies in grades 7-12 in Michigan and Alaska while also completing curriculum development responsibilities and serving as an Advanced Placement Exam Reader for The College Board. Mr. Sarsfield holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan University and is completing the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.