



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# Achievement Academy Charter School

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## School Evaluation Report 2010-11

Visit Date: February 15 and 16, 2011

Report Issued: July 8, 2011

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## INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), jointly with the New York State Board of Regents, are required by law to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the State University Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The State University Trustees, however, consistent with the goals of the New York State Charter Schools Act of 1998, view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively than purely monitoring compliance. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Charter Schools Institute (“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:

- **Document Performance.** The Institute collects information to build a database of a school’s performance over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute can more clearly ascertain trends, determine areas of strength and weakness, and assess the school’s likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute is in a better position to make recommendations regarding the renewal of each school’s charter, and the State University Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school’s charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.
- **Facilitate Improvement.** By providing substantive information about the school’s academic, fiscal and organizational 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 identify areas for improvement.
- **Disseminate Information.** The Institute disseminates information about the school’s performance not only to its board of trustees, administration and faculty, but to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located.

The Institute regularly collects a range of data about each school’s performance over the course of its charter period, which ultimately contributes to that school’s renewal decision. These data include student performance results, financial audits, any legal records of issues addressed, board meeting minutes, and reports from regular evaluation visits conducted by the Institute (or external experts contracted by the Institute) and other agencies with oversight responsibilities.

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding the current visit to the school, summarizing areas of strength and areas for growth. A summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations is also provided, as background and context for the current evaluation. The second section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. Finally, in a third section entitled School Evaluation Visit, this report presents the analysis of evidence collected during an evaluation visit conducted in the current school year, with an italicized paragraph that introduces each specific benchmark and provides a summarizing conclusion.

Because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a single rating or 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

note areas in need of improvement with respect to the school's performance as compared to the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use this evaluation report in ongoing planning and school improvement efforts.

### **Background**

Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are organized into a set of benchmarks that address the academic success of the school, including teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as governance and management. Entitled the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks, these established criteria are used on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

While the primary focus of the visit is an evaluation of the school's academic program and organizational capacity, issues regarding compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed); where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety, it may take additional and immediate action. However, monitoring for compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit.

This is an analysis of the observations and conclusions from this year's evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Some benchmarks are covered in greater detail than others in an effort to highlight areas of concern at the school and provide additional feedback in these areas. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team, is provided.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a school renewal visit to Achievement Academy on October 27-29, 2009. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. Following the 2009 renewal evaluation visit, a letter was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit. The conclusions provided at that time are briefly summarized below.

### **Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1 B)**

Achievement Academy regularly administered diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in the core subject areas that were generally aligned with both state standards and the school's curriculum.

### **Curriculum (Benchmark 1C)**

Achievement Academy had a comprehensive curriculum for the core subject areas of English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, as well physical education and Latin (for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students). These curricula appeared to be aligned to NY State academic standards.

### **Pedagogy (Benchmark 1D)**

Students had limited, if any, opportunity to probe beyond factual information in responding to teacher questions. Classroom instruction was procedural in nature with student involvement often focused on taking notes or filling in the blanks on worksheets.

### **At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1F)**

Achievement Academy was in the process of refining its provision of services/programs for English language learners.

### **Professional Development (Benchmark 1H)**

The professional development of both leadership staff and classroom teachers for at-risk students was inadequate.

### **Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2C)**

Achievement Academy struggled to meet its enrollment projections over the charter term.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CURRENT SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a school evaluation visit to Achievement Academy on February 15 and 16, 2011. Achievement Academy is in its sixth year of operation and in the second year of its current three-year accountability period. Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit, Achievement Academy is on a trajectory toward meeting its Renewal Benchmarks by establishing systems and procedures for an effective instructional program. This conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report. Some of the more salient indicators include the following.

### **Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1B)**

Achievement Academy has a comprehensive system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school's staff uses daily and weekly formative assessments to adjust instruction through a sustained instructional planning effort between teachers and data coordinators.

### **Curriculum (Benchmark 1C)**

Achievement Academy has a clearly defined curriculum which teachers use to prepare students to meet state performance standards. The school's staff uses curriculum maps to effectively plan and revise instruction.

### **Pedagogy (Benchmark 1D)**

Adequate instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school. Teachers plan purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to state standards. Instruction is generally grade-level appropriate; however, most classes are teacher-centered and do not promote higher-order thinking skills.

### **Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1E)**

The school has a strong, well-coordinated administrative structure with high expectations for both teachers and their students.

### **Mission and Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2A)**

Achievement Academy has a well-defined mission and school staff prepares students for selective high schools and colleges.

### **Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2C)**

The school possesses a highly functioning organizational structure, with staff, systems and procedures that allows the school to carry out its academic program. The school has experienced a substantial influx of new students and school leadership monitors enrollment closely.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

### Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	June 22, 2004
Date Initial Charter Approved by Operation of Law	December 4, 2004
School Opening Date	September, 2005

### Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2005-06	1 Dudley Heights Albany, NY	All	Albany City School District
2005-06 through present	42 South Dove St. Albany, NY	All	Albany City School District

### Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	N/A		

### Current Mission Statement

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.

### Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a focus on achieving measurable results in student academic performance, and on ensuring that all students understand and master the standards;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the development and coaching of teachers to facilitate and lead curriculum implementation;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teaching English language arts two to three hours daily, focusing on comprehension, grammar, organization, and writing;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistently explaining and reinforcing behavioral expectations with emphasis on the observable "REACH" behaviors of Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard Work;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• utilizing daily morning circle time to affirm school values and behavior expectations in class, and to recognize student behavior and achievement through a rating and award system;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a longer school day and year; and tutorial support for struggling students</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a Family Association to increase parent involvement.</li> </ul>

## School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2005-06	75	75	60	5	5	210
2006-07	150	150	128	5-6	5-6	210
2007-08	225	135	121	5-7	5-7	200
2008-09	300	N/A	173	5-8	5-8	200
2009-10	300	N/A	232	5-8	5-8	180.5
2010-11	260	N/A	241	5-8	5-8	180.5

## Student Demographics

	2008-09		2009-10	
	Percent of School Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	Percent of Albany CSD Enrollment <sup>3</sup>	Percent of School Enrollment <sup>4</sup>	Percent of Albany CSD Enrollment <sup>5</sup>
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	1
Black or African American	90	62	89	61
Hispanic	9	11	9	12
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	1	5	0	6
White	1	20	1	21
Multiracial	0	1	0	0
<b>Special Populations</b>				
Students with Disabilities <sup>6</sup>	6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0	5	0	6
<b>Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch</b>				
Eligible for Free Lunch	77	59	78	50
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	9	10	7	8

<sup>1</sup> Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

<sup>2</sup> Source: 2008-09 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools. It also does not include Free/Reduced Lunch status, but rather categorizes students as "economically disadvantaged." Free/reduced lunch figures were provided by the school.

<sup>3</sup> Aggregated district data not yet available for 2008-09.

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2009-10 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools. It also does not include Free/Reduced Lunch status, but rather categorizes students as "economically disadvantaged." Free/reduced lunch figures were provided by the school.

<sup>5</sup> Aggregated district data not yet available for 2009-10.

<sup>6</sup> New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is school-reported. District data from NYSED Special Education School District Data Profile.

### Current Board of Trustees<sup>7</sup>

Board Member Name	Position/Committees
M. Christian Bender	Chairman
Lisa Kennedy	Treasurer
Robert Richards	Trustee
Victor Collier	Trustee
Kenneth March	Parent Representative
Saleem Cheeks	Trustee

### School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2005-06 to 2006-07	Nala Woodard, Principal
2007-08 to Present	O'Rita Swan, Principal

### School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2005-06	First-Year Visit	Institute	March 21, 2006
2006-07	Second-Year Visit	Institute	February 27, 2007
2007-08	Third-Year Visit	External (Class Measures)	March 13-14, 2008
2008-09	Fourth-Year Visit	Institute	March 21, 2009
2009-10	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	October 27-29, 2009
2010-11	Sixth-Year	Institute	February 15-17, 2011

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Institute board information.

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

### **Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence**

#### **Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)**

*Achievement Academy has a comprehensive system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses the system to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school uses daily and weekly formative assessments to adjust instruction through a sustained instructional planning effort between teachers and data coordinators. Assessments are used to define current levels of academic performance, provide academic measures for individual goal setting, to evaluate a student's academic progress, and to communicate regularly to parents.*

Achievement Academy administers multiple formative assessments throughout the year, including standardized assessments entitled the *Performance Series* which the school administers three times throughout the academic year. Teachers administer curriculum-based assessments weekly as well as daily end-of-lesson assessments. Teachers demonstrate their commitment to using valid and reliable student academic performance measures. For example, the school-wide writing rubric is correlated to the New York State writing rubric. The school has also taken steps to incorporate additional writing criteria to ensure the quality of student writing surpasses state standards.

The school's academic intervention services (AIS) coordinator examines student assessment data and assists classroom teachers with identifying students in need of additional academic assistance. Teachers and AIS team members meet weekly for data conferences during grade level meetings. Student assessment results are used to evaluate a student's academic progress, and to produce academic measures for individual goal setting. Students are placed into remedial or enrichment courses based on state assessment results.

The school's teachers and principal report an open communication policy with parents. The school regularly communicates with parents regarding students' weekly academic performance. Teachers keep parents informed with weekly progress reports. Parents are able to view student grades and assessment results electronically, through the school's Internet portal. They are also able to email or phone teachers whenever they desire.

#### **Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)**

*Achievement Academy has a clearly defined curriculum which teachers use to prepare students to meet state performance standards. The school has a method to vertically align the curriculum and uses curriculum maps effectively to plan instruction. It has an ongoing system to review and revise the curriculum at the beginning of, and throughout, the academic year.*

The school's staff possesses clearly defined curricular scope and sequences for math, ELA, science, social studies and physical education across all grade levels. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latin language and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Latin dance classes also possess defined curricular scope and sequences. Curriculum maps are logically sequenced by week, month, and content

area and each subject area references state academic standards. The maps include performance indicators, types of assessments and materials for the lesson.

The principal reports that the school analyzes five years of New York State testing data to identify standards frequently tested in the state's exam. These standards are a guide to create a scope and sequence from which teachers produce grade and subject curriculum maps. Teachers insert scope and sequence pacing directly into their curriculum maps. The principal reports that during annual curriculum planning each subject area team meets to discuss and modify curriculum maps based on their student's New York State assessment results. For example, when students did not perform well on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade New York State Science Assessment the science team improved 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade science instruction by prioritizing certain topics and developing more science content for those grades. Teachers share plans with the school's principal and the curriculum modifications are memorialized.

Teachers report that if they need to significantly adjust curriculum pacing based on logistical concerns or assessment results, they confer with the school's director of academics and hold grade level and subject area articulation meetings to develop a method to vertically align the curriculum. This practice ensures that the adjustment does not affect the full coverage of state standards. Teachers report that in addition to adequate planning time they have sufficient curriculum materials.

### **Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)**

*Adequate instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school. Teachers plan purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to state standards. Instruction is generally grade-level appropriate; however, most classes are teacher centered and do not promote higher-order thinking skills. Observed instruction is differentiated through skill grouping within the AIS block but is not evident in core content classes.*

The teacher leads instruction in most classes with no student-to-student interaction. Rapid pace questioning techniques keep students active and following the teacher, though this technique requires students to recall facts and does not include time for in-depth higher-order questions. The school leader reports that students are provided opportunities to exhibit higher order thinking skills during hands-on projects and oral projects. However, in four of seven classes, students were recalling facts or were asked to demonstrate basic skills. In some classes teachers attempt to ask students higher-order-thinking questions; however, the questioning strategy is developing. For example, one teacher asked a student, "Who can predict who the boy is?" The student replied, "No." Despite the inappropriate response, the teacher moved forward with the lesson without taking time to redirect the student.

Instruction is differentiated through skill grouping within the AIS block; yet skill grouping is not evident in core content classes, where the instruction is not differentiated. Teachers report adjusting instruction to meet the needs of students with different learning styles by allowing students to complete some assignments in alternate formats. For example, a writing assignment could be completed through digital media. Inspection team members note that while classroom instruction is generally not differentiated there is some evidence suggesting teachers are attempting to differentiate through the choice of student assignments. For example, in one classroom the bulletin board displays student projects which include optional

project formats such as video, audio and written research. All lessons are purposeful and classroom objectives are clear. Teachers produce lesson plans when requests are made.

### **Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)**

*Achievement Academy has a strong, well-coordinated administrative structure with high expectations for both teachers and their students. The school's administration and leadership team provide regular support to all teachers. The school's schedule allows for significant teacher collaboration which provides a platform for a peer-support network. The school holds teachers accountable for instructional performance and student achievement and teachers are aware of the evaluation criteria.*

The school's principal establishes high expectations for both teachers and students, and teachers are held accountable for instructional performance and student achievement. Teachers report that the principal and the academic director are regularly present in their classrooms and that they receive feedback from the administrators' classroom observations during regular meetings with them. Although teachers have not yet been formally evaluated this academic year, they are aware of the evaluation criteria.

Teachers report that the school's leadership team provides support and suggestions during weekly grade-level and data meetings, which ensure a uniform implementation of the program and better alignment of curriculum between grades. They report receiving support from school colleagues during these meetings and throughout the school-day in a mutually-supportive environment. Teachers have instructional modeling opportunities and conduct peer observations to increase classroom effectiveness. They also have opportunities to meet with teachers from other content areas to plan lessons and discuss curricular pacing. The school's data specialists provide teachers with suggestions on modifying lessons and the curriculum, as well as how to address student achievement deficiencies identified in test results.

### **At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)**

*Achievement Academy has an effective well-defined academic support structure to assist academically struggling students and provides a range of supports during the AIS block to meet the needs of both academically struggling and advanced students.*

The school effectively helps students who do not achieve mastery on state assessments. The school has a structured AIS program with a fulltime AIS coordinator who gathers student achievement data and assists classroom teachers with remediation strategies for academically struggling students. In an observed AIS class the teacher provided a highly structured lesson with clear objectives. The class was rigorous, purposeful, and students were actively engaged.

The AIS coordinator meets with teachers weekly to identify and evaluate students needing remediation or enrichment services, and supports classroom teachers with remediation (curriculum) materials. The AIS coordinator regularly collects student assessment data, and reports results to teachers weekly. Additionally, the school enlists support from local university students who provide tutorial support for academically struggling students.

Students report enjoying the tutorial support, yet there is no evidence that it increases student academic achievement.

The school's special education coordinator reports that teachers can refer academically struggling students to the school's child study team. If necessary, the school's special education coordinator supervises a Response to Intervention (RTI) process with the classroom teacher. The school's special education coordinator and the school's principal report a well-defined process for serving academically struggling students. Although the school possesses well-defined written policies for special education and English language learners the actual number of these students at the school is very low.

### **Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)**

*Achievement Academy promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The school has a comprehensive behavior management program, and is safe and orderly with efficient classroom transitions. Teachers possess sufficient behavior management skills to ensure misbehavior does not interrupt lessons.*

The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. It provides a safe, orderly environment and classrooms are conducive to learning. All staff, including teachers, administration and the school's support staff demonstrate adherence to a school-wide behavior management program. For example, during hallway transitions students walk silently in single file, hands at their side. There are no disruptions or misbehavior during transitions and students transition in an orderly manner, responding appropriately to all staff directions. Students address adults in an appropriate manner and speak to one another with respect, which is a tenet of the school's mission. Evaluation team members report that teachers possess sufficient behavior management skills to ensure misbehavior does not interrupt lessons. Classroom teachers visually scan their classrooms while speaking and immediately redirect students to focus on the lesson.

The school's staff promotes an environment of mutual respect with a focus on student learning. The school's hallways display visual artifacts of student and class academic achievements. During the morning announcements students are publicly praised for their high test scores and classroom academic achievements. Displays of colleges and careers are visible throughout the school building and provide visual reminders of the school's focus toward college preparedness.

### **Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)**

*Achievement Academy's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge. Professional development topics are selected in an ongoing basis in response to observed teacher need and interest. Professional development is differentiated through subject area meetings and external workshops.*

Professional development sessions are a combination of subject-area meetings and external workshops. Professional development workshops are scheduled three times per month with topics based on faculty need. In addition, the principal often includes professional development items within weekly subject and grade level meetings. Teachers may attend

professional development workshops outside the school. Consistent efforts are made to ensure professional development is practical and teachers apply skills in their classrooms. For example, teachers conduct mock student orientations with their peers to ensure lesson preparedness.

Evaluation of professional development is primarily based on teacher surveys and the school principal's pedagogical experience and expertise

### **Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)**

*Achievement Academy is faithful to its mission and implements the key design elements included in its charter. The school implements programs and systems to prepare students for selective high schools. School staff encourages students to demonstrate responsible public citizenship.*

Achievement Academy's staff is faithful to the school's mission and implements key design elements included in the school's charter. The school employs a guidance counselor who works with all students developing high school transition plans, including choosing course sequences which lead to a collegiate high school diploma.

The school's staff prepares students for college preparatory experiences as students iterate their desire and commitment to attend college. In addition to promoting college preparedness the school's commitment to good citizenship is manifest in the school's mission indicators: Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, Hard-Work (R.E.A.C.H). The indicators also serve as foundational components of the school's behavior management program.

### **Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)**

*Achievement Academy has a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program. The school is competently managed, and maintains distinct lines of accountability.*

The school has clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks to achieve its mission and Accountability Plan goals, including a process for regular review and revision. The school is competently managed with clear lines of administrative support. The leadership team develops staff scheduling to support the school's college preparation mission and allocates sufficient resources to support teachers. Teachers and administrative staff demonstrate effective communication with parents and the community.

### **Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)**

*The school board works effectively to achieve the school's mission and provides oversight to the total educational program. The Board focuses on student achievement and accountability plan goals.*

The Board receives sufficient information to provide effective oversight. The school's principal provides ongoing reports to the board. The board chair holds the school leader accountable for student achievement through systematic and regular evaluations.

## Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at Achievement Academy on February 15 and 16, 2011. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

**Team Leader: Dr. Paul Wright** was recently appointed Director of School Evaluation at the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. Dr. Wright will be responsible for the Institute's extensive school evaluation program, overseeing and in many cases leading school evaluation visits by Institute staff as well as coordinating the independent evaluations done on the Institute's behalf. Dr. Wright will lead ongoing efforts to refine the Institute's nationally regarded evaluation protocols and reporting tools; including oversight of the production of the Institute's school evaluation reports which provide valuable information to schools and the public about school progress. He will also coordinate internal staff training on school evaluation. Prior to joining the Institute, Dr. Wright directed Quality Education Partnership, Inc., a national consulting network that conducted evaluations of traditional and charter schools and created strategic management plans for school improvement. The former Development Director for School Design and Strategic Planning of Mesa Public Schools in Arizona, Dr. Wright developed unique schools of choice serving a wide spectrum of learners in coordination with Mesa Public Schools. Dr. Wright also served as Vice President for Student Services at the Leona Group, an Educational Management Organization providing educational services to students throughout Arizona. Dr. Wright received his Ed.D. and his M. Ed. from Arizona State University and his B.A. in Psychology from the State University of New York at Albany

**Institute Team Member: Dr. Ron Miller** is the Vice President for Accountability at the Charter Schools Institute. After teaching for seven years in New York City public schools, Dr. Miller joined the central offices of the New York City Department of Education, where he conducted evaluative research and organizational studies. As Director of the Office of School Planning and Accountability, he served as the educational accountability officer for the Department. In that capacity, he developed school accountability reports for the city schools and coordinated staff development on their use for district administrators in all the high school and community school districts. In addition, he worked with school leaders to develop their competence to use data for school improvement. In this role he developed PASS, a school performance review system which was adopted in 600 city schools. Dr. Miller has regularly presented papers at annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association and has served as Adjunct Assistant Professor at Teachers College Columbia University and Pace University. He holds a BA degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology from Columbia University

**Institute Team Member: Maya Lagana** is an Accountability Analyst for the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. She is responsible for providing technical support related to school accountability plans and the reporting and analysis of individual school performance. Ms. Lagana joined the Institute as an Analyst for School Evaluation. In this position she scheduled ongoing school evaluation visits, communicated with school team members and administrative staff regarding site visit logistics and requirements, developed and disseminated RFP documents, and coordinated the recruitment and work of consultants. Prior to joining the Institute, Ms. Lagana served as a research intern at New Visions for Public Schools in New York City, where she performed data analysis on school performance and

conducted research on a variety of educational issues. In 2008, Ms. Lagana was a Project Manager at Boston Collegiate Charter School in Boston, Massachusetts, where she was responsible for creating and implementing a data organization system as well as analyzing data. During that same year, Ms. Lagana also helped to craft grant proposals and formulate a strategic fundraising plan for Achievement First in Brooklyn, New York. Previously, Ms. Lagana was an Assessment Specialist at the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence in Washington D.C., where she helped to develop teacher certification exams and analyzed item level statistics and demographics information. In addition to her extensive background as an analyst, Ms. Lagana also has experience as a third grade classroom teacher in New York City. Ms. Lagana received her Master of Public Administration degree in Policy Analysis from New York University's Wagner School for Public Service, her Masters of Education degree from Mercy College and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Carleton College

**Institute Team Member: Sean Fitzsimons** is a Program Analyst for the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. He supports SUNY's new charter school application process by addressing questions from applicants, reviewing and analyzing new applications, coordinating the review of applications to establish new charter schools by Institute staff and external educational experts, and drafting application summaries and other related documents. Mr. Fitzsimons most recently served as Chair of the Social Studies Department at Manassas Park Middle School in Manassas Park, Virginia where he guided curriculum sequencing and pacing to align the school's courses with state standards, trained and mentored faculty, and designed and implemented courses in Civics and Economics, American Studies, American History, and World Geography. He also taught remedial reading curriculum to special education students and English language learners. Prior to his service at Manassas Park Middle School, Mr. Fitzsimons was an Administrative and Research Assistant at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C. In addition, Mr. Fitzsimons was a visiting instructor at Shanghai Teachers University in Shanghai, China, where he designed and taught curriculum for English language learners. Mr. Fitzsimons received his Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction and Secondary Education Social Studies from George Mason University and his Bachelor of Arts degrees in International Relations and Political Science from the State University of New York, College at Geneseo

**APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT**

*An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.*

*Visit the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc> to see the complete listing of Benchmarks.*

Benchmarks 1B – 1H, and Benchmarks 2A – 2E were using in conducting this evaluation visit.

	<b>Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</b>
<b><u>Evidence Category</u></b>	<b><u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u></b>
<b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1B</b>  <b>Use of Assessment Data</b>	<p><b>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and state performance standards;</li> <li>the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board;</li> <li>the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy;</li> <li>the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved;</li> <li>the school’s leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school’s academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services;</li> <li>the school’s teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students;</li> <li>a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade;</li> <li>the school regularly communicates each student’s progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and</li> <li>the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</li> </ul>
<b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1C</b>  <b>Curriculum</b>	<p><b>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pedagogy</b></p>	<p>materials) currently in use in relation to the school’s curriculum framework, identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade;</li> <li>• teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans;</li> <li>• teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school’s curriculum;</li> <li>• the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and</li> <li>• the curriculum supports the school’s stated mission.</li> </ul> <p><b>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach;</li> <li>• instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson;</li> <li>• lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>• instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school’s student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments;</li> <li>• all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time;</li> <li>• learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and</li> <li>• teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1E</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Instructional Leadership</b></p>	<p><b>The school has strong instructional leadership.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement;</li> <li>• the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement);</li> <li>• the school’s instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness;</li> <li>• the school’s instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms;</li> <li>• the school’s leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas;</li> <li>• the school’s instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual</li> </ul>

<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1F</b></p> <p><b>At-Risk Students</b></p>	<p>teachers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school’s leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and</li> <li>the school’s leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school’s academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.</li> </ul> <p><b>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs;</li> <li>all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students;</li> <li>the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures;</li> <li>all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students’ Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and</li> <li>the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1G</b></p> <p><b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b></p>	<p><b>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied;</li> <li>classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident;</li> <li>low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and</li> <li>throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</u></b></p> <p><b>Professional Development</b></p>	<p><b>The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers’ pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program;</li> <li>the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s</li> </ul>

	<p>mission, curriculum, and instructional programs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests;</li> <li>• professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school’s Accountability Plan goals;</li> <li>• teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities;</li> <li>• the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers’ varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities;</li> <li>• the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and</li> <li>• the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Renewal Question 2</b>  <b>Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</b></p>	
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<p><u><b>Evidence Category</b></u></p>	<p><u><b>State University Renewal Benchmarks</b></u></p>
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<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2A</b></p> <p><b>Mission &amp; Key Design Elements</b></p>	<p><b>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stakeholders are aware of the mission;</li> <li>• the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and</li> <li>• the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2B</b></p> <p><b>Parents &amp; Students</b></p>	<p><b>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school;</li> <li>• the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it;</li> <li>• few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school;</li> <li>• a large number of parents seek entrance to the school;</li> <li>• parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and</li> <li>• the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Organizational Capacity</b></p>	<p><b>The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations;</li> <li>• staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school’s mission;</li> <li>• the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving</li> </ul>
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	<p>its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals;</li> <li>• the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined;</li> <li>• the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability;</li> <li>• the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted;</li> <li>• the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and</li> <li>• the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2D</b></p> <p><b>Board Oversight</b></p>	<p><b>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school;</li> <li>• the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight;</li> <li>• the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders;</li> <li>• the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity;</li> <li>• the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance;</li> <li>• where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion;</li> <li>• the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and</li> <li>• the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2E</b></p> <p><b>Governance</b></p>	<p><b>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities;</li> </ul>

- the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity;
- the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter;
- the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner;
- the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints;
- the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies;
- the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and
- the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.