



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

New Covenant Charter School

Evaluation Report 2005-2006

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Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277, 518/427-6510, Fax
newyorkcharters.org

Table of Contents

Reader’s Guide.....	2
Background on Charter Schools and the State University.....	2
The State University Trustees’ Oversight Process.....	3
Evaluation Visits and Reports.....	3
The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of Evaluation Visits.....	4
The Present Report.....	5
Keeping This Report in Context	5
School Description.....	7
School Charter History	9
Summary of Renewal Report Findings.....	10
Executive Summary and Conclusions	12
Academic Attainment and Improvement	12
School Leadership.....	13
Assessments and Use of Assessment Data	13
Teaching Staff.....	14
Enrollment.....	14
Fiscal Soundness.....	14
Legal Compliance	14
Board Oversight.....	15
Benchmark Analysis and Evidence	16
Academic Attainment and Improvement	16
English Language Arts.....	18
Mathematics.....	19
Science	20
Social Studies.....	21
School Leadership.....	22
Assessments and Use of Assessment Data	23
Teaching Staff.....	24
Enrollment.....	25
Fiscal Soundness.....	25
Legal Compliance	28
Board Oversight.....	29
Appendix – Benchmarks Used During the Visit.....	31
Visit Data	42

Reader's Guide

Background on Charter Schools and the State University

Charter schools are public schools that operate independently and autonomously of local school districts and are created by civic leaders, community groups, educators and parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities and improving student achievement, particularly for children at risk of academic failure. The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 authorizes the creation of charter schools.

Under the Charter Schools Act, 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) have the power to create charter schools and thereafter to renew charters of successful schools. 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 applications to renew the charters of existing charter schools. In each case the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of State University 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 schools' 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 the State University 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 Charter Schools 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, 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 school's 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 go out of business.

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, respectively, 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.

Evaluation Visits and Reports

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 evaluation report is a product of one of those visits.

In evaluating schools, 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. 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.

In particular, and as this report demonstrates, the Institute uses a series of qualitative indicators 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. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), these benchmark indicators are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's third through eighth 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 incomplete 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.¹

Over time of course, and particularly at the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators – student test scores – take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators begin to diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools are responsible for results (outcome measures).

However, while decisions at renewal in subsequent renewal cycles involving the effectiveness of the educational program are determined almost solely by its students' collective performance on standardized tests during the most recent charter period, the Institute continues to use the qualitative benchmarks regarding the educational program's effectiveness. The reason for this is that it can give the school (and 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.

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of Evaluation 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 a particular year in the renewal cycle. For example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be facing renewal, having been renewed previously only for two years. It will therefore receive a renewal evaluation visit, whereas another school that 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 follow-up report, which all schools in that position receive.

As such, each of the Institute's evaluation 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 and is linked to the Institute's evaluation protocols, which indicate in what years the Institute conducts evaluation and renewal inspections.

¹ 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.

The Present Report

The information contained within this report is the result of evidence obtained during the Institute's visit to New Covenant Charter School conducted in the spring of the school's seventh year of operation (the school's second year of operation of its second five-year charter). In addition to this reader's guide, the report contains a brief description of the school, a summary of the Institute's findings from the school's most recent renewal report (typically generated in its fifth year of operation), conclusions and analysis from the present visit, a subset of the benchmarks utilized by the inspection team as the lens through which the school was examined and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the visitors and the date of the visit.²

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); the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline; and the fiscal soundness of the school. 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. Evaluation visits typically include a meeting with the principal/director, classroom visitations, and interviews of staff, students and board members, in addition to reviewing student work.

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. The Institute is also aware that, even in subsequent charter periods, charter schools must continue to ensure that the following standards are maintained:

- Positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- Clear operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- Sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- Strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;

² The specific benchmarks that were used are attached to the report.

- Consistent staff familiarity with and use of an effective system for behavior management; and
- Rigorous program designed to retain qualified staff and minimize 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 that school on that 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 that the school is “on track” toward a subsequent renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement.

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—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

New Covenant Charter School was approved by the State University Board of Trustees in August of 1999 and opened in September of that year. It was founded by a group of community leaders, including the then President of the local chapter of the Urban League. The school was partnered with, through a contract, Advantage Schools, Inc., a for-profit company that provided comprehensive school management services.³ Located in the Arbor Hill community of Albany, and due to the fact that it won approval to open in the summer of 1999, the school was initially housed in temporary modular structures enrolling 398 students in grades Kindergarten through five. Currently the school is chartered to enroll 927 students in grades Kindergarten through six.

The mission of the New Covenant Charter School is as follows:

The overarching mission of the New Covenant Charter School is to create a school that will register continuous academic and social gains and student performance while serving the diverse needs of its student population. Our mission further underscores a commitment to the responsible use of financial resources, high levels of customer satisfaction, and a quality-learning environment for students and teachers as a means of ensuring its academic success. Children are to be held to the highest standards and are expected to be Respectful, Responsible, and a Positive Role Model.

After its first year, the school terminated its management agreement with Advantage Schools Inc., and amended its charter to allow it to contract with Edison Schools, Inc., another educational service provider. At the same time, New Covenant was put on probation, and directed to comply with a Remedial Action Plan requiring the school to improve its financial controls and reporting as well as its facility, which was over-crowded and in disrepair. Enrollment was also capped at 400 students until the new, permanent facility was completed. Due to financial mismanagement at the board level, including particularly its chairman, the school also experienced substantial turnover in its board.

In September 2001, the facility was completed and New Covenant moved into a new building on North Lark Street in Albany. By complying with this aspect of the Remedial Action Plan, the school was permitted full enrollment under the charter. In April 2002, the State University Trustees found the school had met the remaining terms of the Remedial Action Plan and removed it from probation.

The school was renewed for five years in May 2004. However, there were two conditions placed upon the school's renewal. First, New Covenant Charter School was required to cease instruction in grades seven and eight (as a result of poor academic performance in the school's junior academy) and was restricted to matriculating students in fifth and sixth grades who had previously attended, respectively, fourth and fifth grades at New Covenant. The school violated this condition in September 2004; upon being notified of the violation the school took appropriate corrective action. A second condition requiring that the school file a timely audit

³ Such companies are known variously as management companies, educational management organizations (EMOs) or educational service providers (ESPs). They can be either for- or not-for-profit.

report by December 1 of each year was also placed upon the renewed charter. Unfortunately, in March 2006, New Covenant Charter School was once again placed on probation for violating the second of these two conditions, having filed its audit report some 53 days late.

As of the date of this report, the school remains in partnership with Edison Schools, which is responsible for effectively implementing all aspects of the school design. The design elements of the school include:

- academic standards, including state standards and those developed by the school's educational management organization;
- a professional development program for the entire faculty and staff;
- an extended school day;
- frequent assessment of student performance relative to academic standards;
- supportive organizational structure; and
- enhanced connections among the school, the families it serves, and the Arbor Hill community.

In April 2006, one of New Covenant's teachers was arrested. The teacher was charged with endangering the welfare of a child, based on an incident alleged to have happened in July of 2005, and linked to a complaint filed by the child's parent in January of this year with the school's principal and the school's board of trustees. The parent, after receiving an unsatisfactory response from the school, filed a complaint with the Albany City Police Department. As of the date of this report, no resolution had been reached regarding the arrest, the parent's claim, or whether the board or others violated the law or the school's charter.

School Charter History⁴

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
1 st Charter – 1 st Year	99-00	1st	Yes	Evaluation Report	School Placed on Probation on August 28, 2000
1 st Charter – 2 nd Year	00-01	2nd	Yes	Evaluation Report	
1 st Charter – 3 rd Year	01-02	3rd	Yes	Third Year External Evaluation Report	
1 st Charter – 4 th Year	02-03	4th	No		School Taken off Probation on April 23, 2002
1 st Charter - 5 th Year	03-04	5th	Yes	Renewal Report	School Renewed for Five Years with Conditions on May 24, 2004
2 nd Charter– 1 st Year	04-05	6th	No		
2 nd Charter– 2 nd Year	05-06	7th	Yes	Evaluation Report	School Placed on Probation on March 13, 2006
2 nd Charter– 3 rd Year	06-07	8th			
2 nd Charter– 4 th Year	07-08	9th			
2 nd Charter– 5 th Year	08-09	10th			

⁴ Because, initially, charters are generally issued in the spring (during the school year), they expire five years later, i.e., in the spring during the school year. Accordingly, the State University Trustees routinely renew a school's charter during that period for several months so that the charter expires during the summer. This chart does not reflect these routine renewals.

Summary of Renewal Report Findings

In January of 2004, New Covenant Charter School (“NCCS”) was granted a full-term five year renewal with conditions from the State University Trustees. Prior to making this recommendation to the Trustees, the Charter Schools Institute (“Institute”) conducted a renewal visit of the school during the fall of 2003. At that time, school inspectors observed classrooms, met with administrators and board members and interviewed teachers. Based upon evidence collected at the time of the visit, the Institute issued several findings in its report to the State University Trustees, the key points of which are summarized below.

In general, the Institute found that the academic program in the school’s primary and elementary academies was more effective than that in the junior academy, for reasons that are detailed throughout the renewal report. As a result, the school was reauthorized to continue providing instruction in grades Kindergarten through six, but was required to cease instruction in grades seven and eight as a condition of renewal. Moreover, students were not allowed to matriculate in grades 5 and 6 if they had not previously attended grades four and five, respectively.

The Institute’s recommendation for a full-term five year renewal for grades Kindergarten through six was heavily based on “an overall upward trajectory in [student] achievement in grades K-4 over the life of [the school’s] first charter.” In particular, inspectors noted that fourth grade students had recently outperformed their peers in comparable Albany district schools by showing greater gains year to year on the state’s English language arts and mathematics assessments. However, while the Institute’s recommendation was positive as to the lower grade program, the Institute’s report (and visit) highlighted several areas that clearly required improvement if the school were to continue its upward trajectory.

For instance, the renewal team also noted that data collected from internal assessments, including the Edison Benchmark Assessment System, were not maximized to increase student learning and achievement. In the case of the benchmark assessments, inspectors noted the lack of alignment between the assessments and state performance standards, as well as the school’s own Accountability Plan. Inspectors further admonished the school of the need to increase levels of academic rigor in grades one through five.

Throughout the renewal report, the Institute noted the detrimental effect of administrative and staff turnover upon the school’s academic program. The report states, “The lack of consistent leadership at the school level and a high rate of teacher turnover have hampered implementation of the [professional development] program.” Furthermore, the renewal inspection team noted that “the school has not consistently had effective leadership at the board and administrative level,” and that “a lack of consistency and leadership has also been evident at the director level as well during certain times of the charter. The school has had nine school directors during the term of its charter, with the current chair of the board serving the longest tenure, two years.”

With regard to the school’s viability as an organization, in addition to challenges related to maintaining consistent leadership, the board had struggled to provide adequate financial oversight. In the renewal report, the inspectors noted that the school had recently failed to file its

audit report in a timely manner, that the board had not monitored the budget, and that the school had operating deficits in three of the first four years of its charter – “a function of higher than expected facility costs and insufficient [student] enrollment.” It was these findings that caused the Institute to recommend that renewal be conditioned upon requiring that the school file a timely audit report by December 1st or face revocation of its charter.

Executive Summary and Conclusions

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the present visit to the New Covenant Charter School on January 31, 2006. On the basis of this visit, the Institute concludes that the major qualitative findings in the renewal report as to the school's educational program, which included some serious concerns, generally continue to be applicable two years later. The "overall upward trajectory in student achievement in grades K-4" described in the renewal report has not been sustained. Further, the school has failed to solidify its organizational and financial structures, resulting in the school violating each of the explicit conditions of renewal imposed by the State University Trustees.

In particular, and of greatest concern, the low performance on the whole of students in English Language Arts and in math (with the very notable exception of the fourth grade) suggests that the structural and organizational issues highlighted at the time of renewal are still present. Certainly, administrative and staff turnover has persisted in the past two years. The high rate of teacher turnover continues to hamper implementation of the professional development program. With New Covenant's tenth principal starting his job at the beginning of the school's seventh year, it is again just establishing a leadership structure. To its credit, in supporting the delivery of instruction, the school has begun to rely more on using sample state assessments, but the internal assessment program is still not generally aligned to the state's performance standards. Further, consistent with findings from the renewal report, the school's board of trustees is still struggling with providing adequate financial oversight. The school has continued to fail to file its annual audit report in a timely manner, and the audits have reported on a weak overall financial condition. This has resulted in the school being placed on probation by the State University Trustees upon the recommendation of the Charter Schools Institute. In addition, New Covenant Charter School is severely under-enrolled. In turn, this has had a detrimental effect on the school financially; moreover the outlook for enrollment increases is not favorable in the near term. Finally, the Institute concludes that the school's board of trustees has failed and is failing to provide adequate levels of oversight with regard to the academic program and financial and organizational viability of the school.

Each of these conclusions is summarized below. The evidence base and further analysis is contained in the Benchmark Analysis and Evidence section of this report.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

In 2004-05, the first year of the new charter period, the school exceeded its absolute measure in mathematics (more than 65 percent of its fourth grade students who had been enrolled continuously for two years or longer were proficient on the state math test); it also met or came close to meeting its comparative measure in math with its fourth graders out-performing the district as well as two of three similar schools. On the state's fourth grade English Language Arts (ELA) examination over the five years of the first charter period, New Covenant's performance changed from abysmally low during the first three years to far below its stated absolute measure in the final two years. Its performance in 2004-05 during the first year of the renewal period was flat and low with slightly more than one-third of the students showing proficiency.

While the absolute and comparative measures in math in the fourth grade were positive in 2004-05, the value-added data from the administration of the Terra Nova (a nationally normed standardized assessment) were not nearly so positive and appear to indicate that the fourth grade results are not indicative of student learning and achievement throughout the school. Students in all grade level cohorts (except for the fourth grade) failed to meet the value-added measure the school had set. Moreover, while some of the grade level cohorts did show some year-to-year improvement, none of them scored higher than the 32nd percentile on either the reading or math Terra Nova tests in spring 2005. The school posted the same results in the reading portions of the Terra Nova as well. This low level of performance across the other grades suggests that with limited resources and an inadequate instructional program (see below) the school faces a difficult challenge in enabling students to demonstrate proficiency in a state testing program expanded to include grades three through eight. As such, and because the school's ability to be renewed in 2008-09 will heavily depend on showing that students are meeting academic standards across grades and subjects, the school's likelihood of being renewed, if present trends continue, is doubtful at best.

School Leadership

During the school's first year of its second charter period (2004-05), the school's principal knowingly violated the condition of renewal regarding matriculation of fifth and sixth graders who had not attended fourth and fifth grades, respectively. This, and other factors, led the school's board to seek a new leader for the 2005-06 school year. A new leader is now in place. Acknowledging the need to stabilize the leadership of the school, the school's new principal has set out to codify a set of practices that will systematize the school's operations. Due to constant changes in the school's administrative team, New Covenant was, at the time of the visit, adjusting to yet another approach to instructional leadership with an entirely new administrative team hired by the principal. The current coordination of instructional leadership and the effectiveness of these efforts have yet to be determined. There is no evidence that Academy Directors and Curriculum Coordinators synchronize their coaching and guidance, much less how they determine if their extensive efforts are effective.

Assessments and Use of Assessment Data

As noted in the school's renewal report, there continues to be "...little evidence that assessments [were] aligned to State performance standards and therefore the majority of the school's accountability plan goals and measures." Despite the school's recent efforts to monitor student learning in relation to the state performance standards and its own Accountability Plan through the administration of sample New York State assessments, there is no alignment between the school's Accountability Plan and New York State performance standards, and Edison Benchmark Exams. Incorporation of sample New York State assessments into the school's internal assessment system was not the result of a carefully planned and articulated school-wide instructional plan to increase student learning and achievement, but rather the result of adaptive decisions by the Achievement Director, Academy Directors, and Curriculum Coordinators.

Teaching Staff

New Covenant Charter School has experienced a high rate of teacher turnover from the 2004-05 to the 2005-06 school year. Attrition in the administration and teaching staff has been too widespread to support continuous improvement in teachers' pedagogical skills to contribute to increased levels of student learning and achievement.

Enrollment

As noted above, under-enrollment at the school is having a significant detrimental impact on the school's operations. At present, enrollment is only at 80 percent of capacity with a resulting loss in revenue. Moreover, the school faces an increasingly competitive climate. During the next school year, the school will not only continue to face increased competition for its fifth and sixth grade students due to the existence of three charter middle schools, but also increased competition for its Kindergarten through first grade students as a new elementary school is slated to open and an existing charter elementary school is doubling in size. At present, the school does not appear to have a viable plan for attracting students at the levels it needs long-term to remain fiscally solvent. It should be noted that any proposed cuts in programmatic spending will likely make the school less attractive to parents in the short-run and will certainly impact the quality of the school's educational program in the long-run. In turn this will materially affect the school's chances for renewal.

Fiscal Soundness

Well into its seventh year of operation, the New Covenant Charter School has not fully implemented all elements required for a fiscally sound school. Specific issues include a continuing failure to file its annual audit report on time, the existence of reportable conditions and material weaknesses identified as part of its annual audit, and a weak overall financial condition. The failure of the school to file its audit report on time (in fact 53 days late), has resulted in the school being placed on probation for the remainder of the charter. As part of that probation, the school must submit its financial reports, including audits, in a timely manner as well as avoid any material and significant violations of its charter. In addition to being late, the audit identified three material weaknesses. The school has prepared a corrective action plan to address the weaknesses identified by the audit.

Legal Compliance

Based on a review of the Institute's files, New Covenant Charter School has had difficulty complying with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. The school has violated both of the Additional Assurances and Terms of its Charter Agreement, which were explicit conditions of charter renewal – one related to restricted enrollment in the upper grades and the other related to the timeliness of audits. As a result, the school was placed on a corrective plan and probation, respectively. The school has also materially failed to meet the terms of its charter with respect to sufficient enrollment on more than one occasion. In addition, a compliance testing visit conducted in February 2006 found that the school was not in full compliance with mandatory employee criminal background checks. The school is again being placed on a corrective

action plan to remedy the situation. Finally, on several occasions the school has not submitted required information to the Institute or the State Department of Education, which is a violation of its charter.⁵

Board Oversight

The Institute concludes that the school's board of trustees has failed to provide adequate levels of oversight with regard to the academic program and financial and organizational viability of the school.

Although New Covenant is not yet seeking its second renewal, in keeping with the Institute's charge by the State University Trustees to be as forthright as possible with regard to a school's performance, and in keeping with the ongoing focus on attainment of the benchmarks established by the State University Trustees, the Institute believes it is important to place the current visit conclusions in context. Pursuant to the State University's criteria for renewal for charter schools that previously have been awarded a full-term charter, a charter school is eligible for a subsequent renewal if it can show, among other things, that it consistently met or came close to meeting its academic program Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, and that it is financially sound and organizationally viable. As indicated above, the school cannot make this critical showing at present. Moreover, and as also set forth above and in more detail below, it was not evident to the visiting team that the school has the systems, structures, personnel and resources that will allow it to have the results in place to make these critical showings in the fall of 2008 when the school will undergo its second renewal review. Whether at the level of classroom instruction or board oversight of the academic program, significant and multiple weaknesses exist, combined with an overall lack of a sense of urgency about addressing known deficiencies. It is, therefore, the Institute's conclusion that unless drastic and sustained remedial efforts are undertaken, from the school board level to the classroom, it will be extremely difficult for the school to be able to make a compelling case for renewal during the 2008-09 school year.

⁵It should be noted that just prior to the issuance of this report, in April 2006, a teacher of the school had been arrested. However, no resolution had been reached regarding the arrest, the parent's claim, or whether the board or others violated the law or the school's charter.

Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Academic Attainment and Improvement

In the first year of its renewal charter (2004-05), New Covenant for the first time came close to achieving the mathematics goal stated in its Accountability Plan, by meeting two of the three key math outcome measures. While this success is notable, it is notable as well that it is limited to a single grade, fourth grade, and in that subject. In contrast, the school continued to be far from meeting its Accountability Plan goal in English language arts. As was the case throughout the first charter period, it met none of the key ELA measures. The school has reported limited information about its performance in science and social studies.

In particular, in mathematics, the school's Accountability Plan goal states that students will demonstrate proficiency. Over the five years of the first charter period, New Covenant's performance on the state's fourth grade mathematics examination fluctuated each year below its stated absolute measure with about half the students achieving proficiency. In the first year of the new charter period, the school achieved its stated measure for the first time. Its comparative performance on the fourth grade exam parallels that of its absolute level of performance. During the first charter period, New Covenant repeatedly under-performed the Albany school district and, with the exception of one year, the similar schools to which it has compared itself. In 2004-05, after renewal, it met its absolute measure in mathematics and out-performed the district as well as two of three similar schools with 75 percent of students at standards or above.

In addition to Accountability Plan measures based on the state's fourth grade mathematics examination, the Plan also has a math measure based on the Terra Nova test. In this case, the year-to-year value added to student learning is measured in grades one through six, not just the fourth grade. Results for 2004-05 indicate that only the fourth grade students met the measure of showing substantial gains in the spring compared to the previous fall.⁶ The other five grades did not meet the measure; and three grades declined from fall to spring. The school did not report in its 2005 annual Accountability Plan Progress Report value-added results for earlier years.

In ELA, the Accountability Plan goal is that students will be proficient readers and writers of the English language. On the state's fourth grade ELA examination over the five years of the first charter period, New Covenant's performance changed from abysmally low during the first three years to far below its stated absolute measure in the final two years. Its performance in 2004-05 during the first year of the renewal period is better than the previous year but overall is still generally flat with slightly more than one-third of the students showing proficiency. Similarly, in comparison to the Albany school district and its selected similar schools, New Covenant has continued consistently to under-perform on the ELA exam, despite the District registering low levels of performance overall.

On the value added to student learning in reading based on the Terra Nova test, again students in all grade level cohorts except for the fourth grade failed to meet the value-added measure. As in mathematics, the school did not report results for earlier years.

⁶ Because student performance on standardized tests typically declines in the fall compared to the previous spring, the fall-to-spring gains reported actually *inflate* gains in student achievement. If students' spring-to-spring scores were compared, rather than fall-to-spring scores, the result would likely be lower gains.

In science, the Accountability Plan goal is that students will have a solid background in science concepts and experimentation. The 2005 Progress Report indicates that New Covenant came close to meeting its absolute measure in science, registering a substantial increase from the previous year.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), New Covenant is expected to make adequate yearly progress toward enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and math examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the State Education Department issues a school accountability report. The most recent report lists New Covenant's 2005-06 School Accountability Status as a Charter School In Good Standing.

In its Progress Report, New Covenant presents an additional analysis showing the 2005 fourth grade ELA results by the number of years students have attended the school. According to the data, fourth graders scored higher on average with each successive year of enrollment. While this pattern may demonstrate relatively better performance with more time at the school, in absolute terms, it suggests an inadequately low level of performance for these students. For example, it reports that fourth graders who entered New Covenant in the first grade (and have attended 4+ years) out-scored their peers who entered the school in the second or third grade. However, with a reported scaled score of 641, this cohort on average scored below the cut-off for scoring at proficiency at Level 3. As such, students who have attended New Covenant since first grade, while scoring better than their more recently enrolled peers, are still performing at a low level.

During the 2004-05 school year, the school concentrated its resources in providing remedial instruction in ELA and math to the fourth grade. Results on the state's fourth grade math exam attest to this special program. Better evidence of these efforts can be found in the relative performance of the fourth grade cohort on the reading and math Terra Nova tests compared to those of the other five grades. Again, the fourth grade was the only one to register substantial gains from fall to spring. Indeed, while some of the grade level cohorts did show some year-to-year improvement, none of them scored higher than the 32nd percentile on either the reading or math Terra Nova tests in spring 2005. This low-level of performance across the other grades suggests that with limited resources and an inadequate instructional program the school faces a difficult challenge in enabling students to demonstrate proficiency in a state testing program expanded to grades three through eight.

English Language Arts

Accountability Plan		Results (in percents)								
Type of Measure	Outcome Measures in Current Charter	Grade	Comparison	Original Charter					Renewal Charter	
				1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	
Absolute	For the 2004–05 school year, sixty-five percent of fourth graders who have been continuously enrolled at New Covenant Charter School for two or more years will score proficient (level three or above) on the New York State English Language Arts Assessment.	4		N/A	N/A	19.5	40.0	30.5	37.9	
Comparative	Each year, the percent of all New Covenant Charter School students scoring proficient on the New York State English Language Arts exam will exceed the percent of proficient students in the four selected comparison schools as well as the Albany City School District.	4	New Covenant	9.0	22.2	15.3	40.2	29.2	39.0	
			Albany	54.0	41.5	48.4	46.7	44.4	53.1	
			School 18				40.5	23.1	43.6	
			School 26				17.3	N/A	N/A	
			Philip Schuyler Giffen Memorial	27.1	23.3	19.4	34.3	32.9	42.2	
Value Added	For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of New Covenant Charter School students (first through sixth grade) will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline performance and an NCE score of fifty for reading on the TerraNova Basic Battery Assessment. If a cohort’s baseline exceeds an NCE score of fifty, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.	Grades In Target Year	Original Charter 2003-04				Renewal Charter 2004-05			
			Baseline NCE	Target NCE	Actual NCE	Met Target ?	Baseline NCE	Target NCE	Actual NCE	Met Target ?
		1					33.6	41.8	35.9	No
		2					30.0	40.0	35.5	No
		3					31.5	40.8	37.0	No
		4					33.8	41.9	46.2	Yes
		5					38.0	44.0	37.3	No
		6					37.7	43.8	39.9	No

Source: Results from 2005 Accountability Plan Progress report, school-submitted Excel Workbook, and State Education Department web-site.

Mathematics

Accountability Plan		Results (in percents)								
Type of Measure	Outcome Measures in Current Charter	Grade	Comparison	Original Charter					Renewal Charter	
				1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	
Absolute	For the 2004-05 school years, sixty-five percent of fourth grade students who have been continuously enrolled at New Covenant Charter School for two or more years will score proficient (level three or above) on the New York State Grade Four Mathematics Exam	4				48.7	57.1	52.6	75.0	
Comparative	Each year, the percent of all New Covenant Charter School students scoring proficient on the New York State Mathematics Exam will exceed the percent of proficient students at School 18, School 26, Philip Schuyler Elementary, Giffen Memorial, and within the Albany School District.		New Covenant		26.7	40.4	58.5	48.3	74.2	
		4	Albany			57.0	64.9	69.6	72.5	
			School 18		70.0	65.3	75.0	68.3		
			School 26		45.5	47.7	N/A	N/A		
			Philip Schuyler Giffen Memorial		49.5	45.6	54.2	68.9		
Value Added	For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of New Covenant Charter School students (first through sixth grade) will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline performance and an NCE of fifty for mathematics on the TerraNova Basic Battery Assessment. If a cohort's baseline exceeds an NCE score of fifty, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.	Grades In Target Year	Original Charter 2003-04				Renewal Charter 2004-05			
			Baseline NCE	Target NCE	Actual NCE	Met Target ?	Baseline NCE	Target NCE	Actual NCE	Met Target ?
		1					35.8	42.9	38.4	No
		2					34.4	42.2	31.5	No
		3					35.1	42.5	34.2	No
		4					33.1	41.5	47.6	Yes
		5					39.6	44.8	38.8	No
6					36.1	43.0	39.2	No		

Source: Results from 2005 Accountability Plan Progress report, school-submitted Excel Workbook, and State Education Department web-site.

Science

Accountability Plan		Results (in percents)					Renewal Charter 2004-05		
Type of Measure	Outcome Measures in Current Charter	Grade	Comparison	Original Charter					
				1999-00	2000-01	2001-02		2002-03	2003-04
Absolute	For the 2004-05 school years, sixty-five percent of fourth grade students who have been continuously enrolled at New Covenant Charter School for two or more years will score proficient (level three or above) on the New York State Grade Four Science Exam	4						70.2	
Comparative	Each year, the percent of all New Covenant Charter School students scoring proficient on the New York State Science Exam will exceed the percent of proficient students at School 18, School 26, Philip Schuyler Elementary, Giffen Memorial, and within the Albany School District	4	New Covenant				43.2	69.8	
			Albany				75.0		
			School 18				97.0		
			School 26						
			Philip Schuyler				60.0		
Giffen Memorial				66.0					

Social Studies

Accountability Plan		Results (in percents)							
Type of Measure	Outcome Measures in Current Charter	Grade	Comparison	Original Charter					Renewal Charter 2004-05
				1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	
Absolute	For the 2004-05 school years, sixty-five percent of fourth grade students who have been continuously enrolled at New Covenant Charter School for two or more years will score proficient (level three or above) on the New York State Grade Four Social Studies Exam	5							44.2
Comparative	Each year, the percent of all New Covenant Charter School students scoring proficient on the New York State Social Studies Exam will exceed the percent of proficient students at School 18, School 26, Philip Schuyler Elementary, Giffen Memorial, and within the Albany School District	5	New Covenant						
			Albany School 18 School 26 Philip Schuyler Giffen Memorial						

School Leadership

Prior to the start of the 2005-06 academic year, New Covenant Charter School hired its tenth school leader in seven years of operation. The school's current principal, stated that he "came on running at full speed" because there had been "no consistent leadership" at New Covenant Charter School. He also stated that he needed to immediately hire a full administrative team and that he was also faced with "a number of teachers resigning just before the start of school." The principal further identified his primary challenges as developing "types of instructional and behavioral systems" as well as "accountability systems" and that by instituting such systems he would "take the focus off the people." The school's new principal clearly acknowledges the need to stabilize the leadership of the school and, in the interim, has set out to codify a set of practices that will systematize the school's operations. Due to constant changes in personnel who comprise the school's administrative team, New Covenant Charter School is in the process of adjusting to yet another approach to instructional leadership, as described below.

Evidence collected on the day of the visit suggests that the principal has chosen to hire an entirely new administrative team that, as a group, serves as a body of instructional leaders for the school. For example, during various teacher interviews, teachers more often identified one of the two Academy Directors or one of the Curriculum Coordinators as the instructional leader of the school (though it should be noted that there was not a consistent answer among teachers). Other teachers described the various types of support they receive from the Academy Directors and Curriculum Coordinators, including mentoring, coaching, and classroom observations. The principal also stated that the Academy Directors are expected to conduct six informal observations per day, and each of the Curriculum Coordinators should be conducting two informal observations every day. Academy Directors are additionally entrusted with providing weekly professional development to various groupings of teachers. Thus, many of the responsibilities regarding the development of teachers' pedagogical skills reside with the Academy Directors and Curriculum Coordinators.

Additional evidence suggests that the principal instead focuses on attempts to build instructional systems. One of the members of the administrative team stated that the principal had contributed "daily policy and procedures" to the school. These appear to include requiring monthly reports on a variety of teaching activities, such as weekly teacher and administration reflection worksheets. Although the principal does provide some feedback to teachers through comments on their reflections, other members of the administrative staff stated that they are often asked to follow through with teachers on particular issues regarding instruction. The principal also said he spends a great deal of time administering the school, managing the physical plant and carrying out various human resource responsibilities, and that the job "turned into being a superintendent's job."

However, the extent to which the school's current approach to instructional leadership is coordinated among members of the school's administration and the effectiveness of these efforts has yet to be determined. For example, the written reflections submitted to the school's principal provide no quantitative measure of program effectiveness and are not a means of evaluating the instructional program. A review of these documents (archived in a binder) indicates haphazard submissions and inconsistent entries, despite the principal's concern for inconsistent practices. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Academy Directors and Curriculum Coordinators

synchronize their coaching and guidance, much less how they determine if their extensive efforts are effective.

Assessments and Use of Assessment Data

In 2005-06, New Covenant Charter School's internal assessment system consists of the following components:

- Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) – administered quarterly in grades two through six;
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) – administered each semester in Kindergarten – grade three;
- Edison Benchmark Assessment System – administered monthly in grades two through six;
- Various Sample New York State Assessments – administered intermittently in grades three through six; and
- TerraNova – administered annually to Kindergarten – grade six students.

The integration of sample New York State assessments into the school's internal assessment system is happening for the first time during the 2005-06 school year. In the past, New Covenant Charter School primarily relied upon data collected from the Edison Benchmark Assessment System to predict the degree to which State performance standards would be met, and whether other academic goals were being achieved, and to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction. However, as noted in the school's renewal report, "there [was] little evidence that these... assessments [were] aligned to State performance standards and therefore the majority of the school's accountability plan goals and measures." By incorporating the use of sample New York State assessments into the school's internal assessment system, New Covenant Charter School has begun to take steps to increase the degree of alignment of the school's student assessment practices with State performance standards and the school's Accountability Plan.

However, the use of data collected from sample New York State assessments is primarily used as a baseline measurement of student mastery of content and skills rather than an ongoing diagnostic tool to determine whether State performance standards are being achieved and to make changes to curriculum and instruction. For example, according to members of the school's leadership team, the data collected from the multiple choice sections of the sample New York State assessments is analyzed to identify the four most missed questions within each classroom. With the help of the Curriculum Coordinators and the Achievement Director, teachers are then expected to perform further error analysis on student responses to the most missed questions with the goal of identifying possible explanations for the students' incorrect answers. Curriculum Coordinators next work with teachers to identify strategies for re-teaching content and skills, if necessary, or to supplement the core curriculum to address deficient areas. A Curriculum Coordinator at the school stated that the Edison Benchmark exams or assessments are subsequently used on an ongoing basis to reassess whether State performance standards are being achieved and to make changes to curriculum and instruction.

Despite the school's recent efforts to monitor student learning in relation to the State performance standards and its own Accountability Plan through the administration of sample

New York State assessments, it has not yet fully addressed the challenges presented by the inherent lack of alignment between the school's Accountability Plan and New York State performance standards, and Edison Benchmark assessments. This is partly due to the proprietary nature of the Edison Benchmark exams, which leaves the school with no method of ensuring that levels of student mastery of content and skills previously identified as deficient, by the sample New York State assessments and purportedly addressed by remedial instruction within the classroom, will be assessed by the subsequent Edison Benchmark exams. As a result, the school is unable to utilize the Edison Benchmark assessments reliably to determine whether remedial instruction has been effective and the content and skills in question have been in fact mastered by students.

Furthermore, school stakeholders interviewed by school inspectors were not fully aware of efforts to increase alignment among the school's internal assessment system, State performance standards, and the school's Accountability Plan. For example, when asked what would need to occur in order to move the school closer to meeting its student performance goals, the school's board of trustees did not mention the use of the school's internal assessment system nor the collection and analysis of student performance data as integral to that process. The school's principal also did not articulate the use of sample New York State assessments as an essential part of the school's plan to increase student achievement, but rather as a means of identifying students at risk of academic failure. Moreover, teachers described the process of analyzing student performance data on the New York State assessments as one external to them. This evidence suggests that the incorporation of sample New York State assessments into the school's internal assessment system was not the result of a carefully planned and articulated school-wide instructional plan to increase student learning and achievement, but rather the result of adaptive instructional leadership on the part of the Achievement Director, Academy Directors, and Curriculum Coordinators. As such, any alignment among the school's internal assessment system, State performance standards, and the school's Accountability Plan has not been systematically realized.

Teaching Staff

New Covenant Charter School has experienced a high rate of teacher turnover from the 2004-05 to the 2005-06 school year. Of the school's 52 teachers, 19 were hired in preparation for the current school year (37 percent of the school's teaching staff). Since that time, three teachers have resigned. At the time of the seventh year visit, two teaching positions were filled with substitutes.

New teachers receive training in curriculum and classroom management techniques during the summer at a national summer orientation sponsored by the school's education service provider, Edison Schools, Inc. Those that are hired after the Edison-sponsored national induction receive in-house training on the Edison program. There is no evidence that either of these induction programs have been evaluated.

Additional mentoring for new teachers is available, though the principal stated that there needed to be a higher level of accountability to ensure that the pairing of more veteran and novice teachers is meeting the goals of the program. Academy Directors and Curriculum Coordinators

also provide varying levels of coaching, depending on teachers' individual performance goals and levels of experience.

Regardless of the professional development and coaching provided to teachers new to the school, or "instructional systems" implemented by the school's administration, attrition in the administration and teaching staff has been too widespread to support continuous improvement in teachers' pedagogical skills such that it results in increased levels of student learning and achievement.

The high degree of teacher turnover also appears to have resulted in low morale among teachers. Several teachers identified the rate of teacher turnover as one of the negative characteristics of New Covenant Charter School.

Enrollment

At the time of the seventh year visit, New Covenant Charter School was severely under-enrolled. Authorized to instruct 927 students in Kindergarten through grade 6 during the 2005-06 school year, on the day of the visit the school's current enrollment was 742 students, which is approximately 80 percent of the students the school is chartered to serve. New Covenant Charter School appears to be losing students at an alarming rate; the board of trustees stated that it had lost approximately 30 students during the months of December and January, or 3.8 percent of its enrollment prior to December 2005 over the course of two months.

There is no evidence to suggest that the school clearly understands its inability to attract and retain a sufficient number of students. On the day of the visit, some board members suggested that the lack of extracurricular activities (such as music offerings) available at the school are to blame, while a member of the administrative team suggested that the school was losing students to other charter schools in Albany, particularly those that offer grades five through eight. As a result, the school has not considered viable options to address lack of demand for the seats at the school, or the attrition of students over time.

The under-enrollment of the school is detrimental to New Covenant Charter School in several respects. The principal recently proposed a series of budget cuts to the board of trustees, including the elimination of several positions at the school. However, concerned that the proposed cuts would negatively impact the quality of education that the school provides, the board of trustees has asked the principal to present a range of cost-saving options. In addition, the school was forced to combine some of its fourth and fifth grade students into one classroom due to under-enrollment in those grades. Finally, insufficient enrollment, combined with high facility costs, continues to hamper the school financially.

Fiscal Soundness

The notion of fiscal soundness connotes several interrelated concepts. These include effective financial oversight by the board, realistic budgeting and ongoing monitoring, maintenance of appropriate internal controls and procedures, timely and accurate financial reporting and the maintenance of adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations.

Well into its seventh year of operations, the New Covenant Charter School has not fully implemented all elements required for a fiscally sound school. Specific issues include a continuing failure to file its annual audit report in a timely manner, the existence of reportable conditions and material weaknesses identified as part of its annual audit, and a weak overall financial condition.

The school's renewal charter included an additional assurance that the school agreed to submit its completed annual audit report by December 1 in each year of the charter and further agrees that a failure to do so would constitute a material and significant violation of the charter and be grounds sufficient to place the school on probation or terminate the charter pursuant to section 2855 of the Education Law. This assurance was included as part of the charter due to the school's poor track record in filing reports during its initial charter period. While the school did file its fiscal year (FY) 2004 report in accordance with the assurance (November 14, 2005), it did not file its FY 2005 report until December 23, 2005. Untimely financial reporting, in addition to being a violation of the charter, reflects on the ability of the school to provide appropriate stewardship of funds. The school has been placed on probation for the remaining life of its charter.

In addition to being late, the audit disclosed three reportable conditions that were considered material weaknesses by the school's independent auditor. Reportable conditions involve matters relating to significant deficiencies in the design or operation of the internal control over financial reporting that could adversely affect the school's ability to record process, summarize and report financial data consistent with the assertions of management in the financial statements. A material weakness is a reportable condition in which the design or operation of one or more internal control components does not reduce to a relatively low level of risk that misstatements caused by error or fraud in amounts that would be material in relation to the financial statement may occur and not be detected in a timely manner by employees in the normal course of business.

The school has prepared a corrective action plan to address the weaknesses identified by the audit. Also, at the time of the site visit, members of the school board indicated their intention to contract with an experienced school business administrator to establish a better system for the school's business operations. It was noted that the concept of formally establishing a better operational system was commendable and needed. While this particular proposal did not come to fruition, the Institute has become aware that the school recently hired a certified public accountant to ensure that school transactions are properly and timely recorded. While the scope of work to be performed will be limited, it should nonetheless improve the school's business operations.

Under-enrollment at the school is having a significant detrimental impact on the school's operations. Student attrition during the year is common, but because it typically occurs across all grades rather than being concentrated in one or two grades, there are limited opportunities to realize cost savings. As a result, the loss of per student revenue falls almost directly to the school's bottom line. While the school may weather its current budget crunch, it will do so at the expense of certain program activities as well as a weakening of its overall financial position. The budgetary challenges for the school going forward are even more acute given that, unlike in the

current school year, the school will need to pay Edison Schools Inc. a fee of \$1.3 million in 2006-2007.

At the end of last school year, the school had a net asset deficiency of \$358,658. As of December 31, 2005, the school reported an additional deficiency of revenues over expenses of \$333,000. The school's management partner is projecting a continuing deficiency through the end of the year that will be exacerbated by any further student attrition.

As a result of the school's financial condition, the Institute requested that the school provide evidence of fiscal soundness for the 2006-07 school year, including evidence that it has funds sufficient to provide the program set forth in its charter. Based on a review of documents provided by the School, the Institute concludes that the School's financial viability will be in jeopardy if critical projected enrollment targets are not met for the next school year. The School's financial position is unstable given its current enrollment status. However, assuming its enrollment campaign is even marginally effective, meaning it meets or exceeds its contingency enrollment target of 760 students, it is likely that the School will be financially viable through the end of the next school year.

Given waning enrollment at the School and its weak financial condition the Institute has had serious concerns about the School's ability to remain fiscally sound through the end of the current school year. Institute staff reviewed documents provided by the School and have found that its fiscal plan adequately provides for operations through the end of the current school year. The School has demonstrated it has sufficient resources to pay bondholders, vendors, its management company and by extension its employees and suppliers. While the School will be solvent, it will remain in weak financial condition.

The School also provided a fiscal plan for the upcoming school year under two enrollment scenarios. Under the first scenario, the School assumes enrollment of 866 students. At this level, adequate resources for the School's program would be provided and its overall financial position would improve slightly. However, Institute staff considers this scenario unlikely given increased competition for students from charter schools in Albany and the estimated number of returning students (currently 547, yet projected to be 585 out of 668 possible).

Under a more conservative scenario, the School assumes enrollment of 760 students and a modest deterioration of its financial position on a cash flow basis. While it is more likely that the School can reach the second enrollment level, there is no guarantee it will do so. The School's program will be significantly impacted under this plan both in terms of staff cuts and available educational materials, despite the School's commitment to reduce non-instructional costs first. Furthermore, it is not clear that the School has completely accounted for the ripple effect of its proposed cuts on grant programs under the contingency enrollment scenario, in particular those related to Title I funding. For example, cutting a Title I teacher may appear to be cost savings to the School, but in reality, if the position was funded by grant revenues, no net savings would accrue to the School because the grant revenue would be commensurately reduced.

The School is committing significant resources (\$92,000 plus staff time) to its enrollment campaign, including matching funds from Edison Schools, Inc. The degree of success of its

efforts will not be known in full until enrollment at the School stabilizes in the late fall. At that point, the adequacy of the School's fiscal plan will be firmly established. The School risks near certain financial failure if it significantly misses its contingency enrollment target of 760 students.

While the School's fiscal plan is subject to change based on known conditions, it is important to note that the School does have a plan in place for the upcoming school year. The plan is based on revenue and expense assumptions that are generally reasonable. The School is required to formally submit its approved budget for next year on or before June 30, 2006. The Institute expects that the School will refine its budget until that time as more information becomes available on the status of its enrollment. Also, the School will be notified shortly as to whether it has successfully received a federal Reading First Grant. The School has conservatively assumed that it will not receive the grant, so if it is successful, the grant will provide the School with additional staffing, materials, and professional development resources for the grades targeted by the grant (kindergarten through grade three).

In addition, the Institute specifically asked the School for cash flow projections so that an informed assessment of the School's financial condition could be made. While accounting profit or loss is a vital indicator of the performance of a school, the generation of an accounting profit does not necessarily guarantee its survival. Many businesses fail for lack of cash flow rather than for want of accounting profit. The School's cash flow projections met the minimum requirements in terms of identifying major cash inflows and outflows, but were deficient in terms of the projected timing of revenues. The projections provided by the School are not reflective of the historical timing of receipts; instead projected receipts are distributed on a monthly basis over the entire period. This approach defeats one of the principal purposes of the cash flow projection in that it does not provide an accurate estimate of net cash flow on a monthly basis. The school must submit a monthly cash flow projection along with its budget for next year by June 30, 2006. At that time, the School must ensure that a more meaningful cash flow projection is provided.

The School has recently hired a certified public accountant to ensure that financial transactions of the board are properly and timely recorded. The need for this service was acute, especially over the course of the previous academic year. The Institute anticipates that having this financial professional in place will assist the School in its continued planning process and ongoing operations.

Legal Compliance

As part of a legal review, the Institute reviewed its files including correspondence from the State Education Department to determine New Covenant Charter School's compliance with the terms of its charter agreement and applicable law since renewal of its charter. In September of 2004, the Institute determined that the school violated an Additional Assurance and Term of its charter agreement that prohibited new enrollment in the fifth and sixth grades by admitting 54 students to grades five and six, who were not previously enrolled in the school. The school was placed on a corrective plan, the terms of which it substantially complied with by December 2004. As detailed below, the school also violated the other Additional Assurance and Term of its renewal charter related to the submission of audits in December 2005.

The State Education Department notified the Institute that the school failed to submit several items to the Department in a timely manner as follows: in November of 2004, a report on student statistics that was due in July 2004 had not been received as well as enrollment information that was due in October 2004; on December 24, 2004, the Department was still awaiting enrollment information due on December 1, 2004; and, in January of 2005, the Department reported that the school had not submitted its Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) Plan (school safety plan) on time. The Institute also notes that school board minutes were routinely submitted late in 2004 and, once again, in early 2006, in violation of the school's Monitoring Plan, which is part of its charter agreement.

In March of 2005, the Institute informed the school that it had violated its charter by allowing enrollment to fall below the chartered enrollment. The school then sought a change to its charter to lower enrollment by 68 students, which was granted. However, in July 2005, the school's enrollment again fell below the required level in violation of its revised charter.

On October 18, 2005, the State Education Department informed the school that five employees did not have evidence of proper criminal background checks based on a recent visit to the school. The Institute received two anonymous complaints regarding employees not being fingerprinted at the school, one during the Second Year visit and another in early February 2006. The Institute followed up on this issue and conducted compliance testing with respect to employee background checks on February 11, 2006. While only one new employee and four cafeteria and janitorial employees had not been fingerprinted at all, there were many other deficiencies found in the employee files with respect to compliance with the Charter Schools Act's fingerprinting requirements. As a result, the school was placed on a corrective action plan and given two months to come into compliance. The school submitted the requested information on time and it is currently under review by the Institute.

Board Oversight

The Institute concludes that the school's board of trustees has failed to provide adequate levels of oversight with regard to the academic program and financial and organizational viability of the school. As stated throughout the body of this report, the school's board of trustees has not demonstrated urgency in identifying and addressing critical issues facing the school. For example, with regard to the academic program, when asked what needs to occur in order to move the school closer to meeting its student performance goals, the school's board of trustees did not mention the use of the school's internal assessment system or the collection and analysis of student performance data as integral to that process. Instead, they identified the need to do more "student-centered learning" in the form of projects, as well as opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities such as drama, music, and choir classes. The board's analysis of this critical issue (which was not based on student assessment data) evidences its lack of capacity to provide appropriate oversight over the school's academic program; furthermore, the board's response to this question raises serious questions in regard to the trustees' understanding of the school's primary purpose of improving student learning and achievement.

With regard to the school board's capacity to provide adequate financial and organizational oversight, the Institute has similar concerns. For example, the school's board has repeatedly failed to address under-enrollment at the school and there is no evidence to suggest that the board

has taken steps to research and understand the school's inability to attract and retain a sufficient number of students. On the day of the visit, some board members suggested that the lack of extracurricular activities (such as music offerings) available at the school is to blame.⁷ Furthermore, at the time of the site visit, members of the school board indicated their intention to contract with an experienced school business administrator to establish a better system for the school's business operations. The specifics of the proposal were not shared with Institute staff, but the concept of formally establishing a better system was commendable and needed. While this particular proposal fell through, the Institute has become aware that the school recently hired a certified public accountant to ensure that school transactions are properly and timely recorded.

⁷ This statement further evidences the school board's lack of understanding regarding the school's primary purpose of improving student learning and achievement.

Appendix – Benchmarks Used During the Visit

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Renewal Question 1</p> <p>Is the School an Academic Success?</p>		
<p>Benchmark 1A</p> <p>Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p>1A.1</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>1A.2</p>	<p>Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.3</p>	<p>Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.4</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>1A.5</p>	<p>NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p>	<p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the regular administration of assessments, and the regular assignment of student work, e.g., projects, papers, etc., that are aligned to the state performance standards and to the school’s curricular scope and sequence;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the systematic collection of data from such assessments and student work; • the use of protocols and procedures that ensure that the scoring of standardized and other assessments as well as student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school’s use of assessment data to determine accurately whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; • the school leadership’s use of assessment data to monitor and make improvements and changes to the school’s curriculum and instruction, e.g., changes to remediation, professional development, personnel, etc.; • teachers’ use of assessment data to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction, e.g., re-teaching a key skill where data indicates that the skill was not learned the first time; • a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; and • the regular communication of assessment outcomes to the entire school community, including communication to parents not only of their children’s individual performances but of the performance of the school as a whole.
<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has defined with precision in each grade and core academic subject the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve—at a minimum such skills and knowledge are aligned with and as rigorous as the relevant state performance standards; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible for teaching and have timely access to guidelines (scope and sequence, pacing

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>charts, etc.) available for developing lesson plans;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers develop lesson plans that are in alignment with the guidelines and follow those plans; and • the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.
<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the priorities set by the school’s leadership are responsive to and consistent with achieving the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals and addressing deficiencies; these priorities are communicated to, and understood by, the school’s instructional staff; • the school’s leadership has taken concerted and consistent action in line with these priorities; • the school’s leadership has in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teachers’ effectiveness and quality; • the school’s leadership, based on classroom visits, and other data available to it, provides direct ongoing coaching and support in classrooms as well as structured opportunities for teachers to plan for the delivery of the instructional program; • the school’s leadership makes staffing decisions that are driven by its evaluation system and has in place a system for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and other instructional personnel that the school needs to meet its academic goals and measures; • the chief executive has deployed a leadership team whose members, in executing their roles and responsibilities, are able to support the effective delivery of the instructional program; and • the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers demonstrate subject-matter competency in the subjects they teach; • lessons are focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards and reflect a clear understanding of students’ current skill and knowledge; • students are fully engaged in focused, purposeful activities; • instruction is delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • instructional time is maximized, transitions are efficient, there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers ask challenging questions to provoke student problem solving skills and assess student learning.
	<p>1D.3 The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployment of resources sufficient to support interventions and implement programs, which reflect a range of services and needs (in-class and remedial support, special education and ELL programs), depending on students’ academic and/or behavioral needs; • screening procedures for identifying students and providing them with the appropriate intervention, including appropriate Child Find procedures; • a common understanding among classroom teachers of the interventions and services available

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>to students at risk of academic failure, as well as procedures for accessing them;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordination of interventions and services with those of the mainstream program; and • monitoring the performance of students and using established school-wide and legal exit criteria for students, who based on their performance or other required assessments and evaluations, no longer need special interventions or services.
<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1E</p>	<p>The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued; • low-level misbehavior is not tolerated, e.g., students are not allowed to opt-out of learning or engage in quiet chatter during class time; • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1F</p>	<p>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> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient resources to support a comprehensive program; • the content of the program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional strategy; • annual plans are derived from a school needs-assessment, based on identified instructional weaknesses, teacher interests, and analyses of student outcomes; • the school earmarks effective, ongoing support and training to novice teachers and teachers new to the school; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

Renewal Question 2
Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance</p>	<p>2C.1</p>	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board will have received regular reports in writing from the school leadership in regards to key indicators of the school’s academic progress; the content of those reports, and a calendar for them, will have been agreed to by the board and the leadership team; • the board (or a committee thereof) will understand the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the
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Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>board to provide effective oversight;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board will have conducted formal evaluations of the school’s management and will have acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrate shortcomings in management’s performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board will have taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the board will not have made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; • the board will have established a set of priorities and a strategic plan that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and will have effectively worked to implement those goals and plans; and • the board will have in place a process for selecting new members as needed and structural continuity.
	<p>2C.2</p> <p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics)—which are consistent with those set forth in the charter—and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school’s 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

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy, including acting in a timely fashion on such complaints;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has abided by its by-laws, including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; and • the school board has in place a set of board policies which are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.
<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p>	<p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during the term of its charter, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements; • at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations; • the school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met; • the school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house, and where appropriate, independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?</p>		
<p>Benchmark 3A</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3A</p>	<p>The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • the budget process starts early and input from board members, school administration and staff is solicited and considered in developing the budget; • the school’s long-range fiscal plan is compared frequently to actual progress and adjusted to meet changing conditions; and • budget variances are analyzed routinely and material variance are discussed and addressed at the board level including any necessary budget revisions.
<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3B</p>	<p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management’s direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies and analyzes risks and takes actions to mitigate such risks; • the school has controls in place to ensure that

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>management decisions are properly carried out;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy; • the school’s board members and employees adhere to a code of ethics; • the school makes purchasing decisions that consider price, quality and dependability and makes each purchasing selection with the intention of maintaining a top-quality school; • the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; • the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; • the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements; • a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; • the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; • the school ensures that employees, board members and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and • the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, State Education Department, or the Institute, if needed.
<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p>	<p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>The following reports will have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual financial statement audit reports, including federal Single Audit report if applicable. • annual budgets and cash flow statements. • un-audited quarterly reports of income and expense. • bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and State Education Department; and • grant expenditure reports.
<p>Benchmark 3D Financial Condition</p>	<p>3D</p>	<p>The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly; • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • the school provides education services at a level that meets the needs of all students demonstrated by student results that meet or exceed state standards; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

Visit Data

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Seventh Year Visit at New Covenant Charter School on January 31, 2006. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

MARK CLARKE Senior Analyst

Mr. Clarke is a recent graduate of the Building Excellent Schools program in Boston, Massachusetts, a program designed to both train future charter school leaders and to assist them in creating excellent schools. Prior to his participation in that program, Mr. Clarke had been a middle school mathematics teacher, a mathematics coach for the Office of Curriculum and Instruction for the Boston Public Schools, and a team leader for the Harbor School in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Mr. Clarke has also worked with elementary and middle school children in a variety of community programs. He received his Bachelor of Science in Business Management and Finance from Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island.

WILLIAM J. LAKE Vice President for School Fiscal Accountability

Mr. Lake was an auditor with New York State agencies for 15 years prior to joining the Institute in December 2003. Mr. Lake spent 13 years with the State Education Department (SED) where he conducted audits of public and private schools and BOCES. In addition, Mr. Lake was significantly involved in the design and operation of the system to review and process financial statement and federal Single Audit reports at SED. A graduate of Siena College, Mr. Lake is a Certified Government Financial Manager and has served for the past three years as a state representative on the Public School Accounting Committee of the New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants.

RON MILLER, PH.D. Vice President for Accountability

Dr. Miller 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.

SUSAN SEYMOUR
Senior Analyst

Susan Seymour is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute, 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.

JENNIFER SNEED, PH.D.
Senior Vice President

Dr. Sneed is a veteran educator with 29 years of experience as a public school special education teacher and administrator (Illinois and New York), an Assistant Manager for Deaf Services at the postsecondary level (Indiana), and as a state level education policymaker (New York). She received both her Bachelor of Science in Education of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Master of Science in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from Illinois State University in Bloomington, Illinois. Dr. Sneed earned both her Certificate of Advanced Study and her Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration with a focus on Education Policy, Politics and Law from the State University of New York – Albany.

KIM WECHTENHISER
Senior Analyst

Ms. Wechtenhiser recently served as the Coordinator of New Schools Development in the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts Department of Education, where she led the review of new charter school applications, provided technical assistance to newly chartered schools, participated in the ongoing review of their academic and organizational performance, and oversaw the charter amendment process. Ms. Wechtenhiser is the former Lead Teacher of Spanish at City on a Hill Charter Public School in Boston, where she also served as faculty representative to the school's Board of Trustees. Prior to her work at that school, she taught Spanish at Westfield Public School and English at the Universidad de Córdoba in Spain. Ms. Wechtenhiser holds a B.A. in Spanish and Secondary Education and a M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature, both from Simmons College. She earned an Ed.M. in School Leadership from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.