



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

## Renewal Report

### Sankofa Charter School<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved a name change for this school (from “KIPP Sankofa Charter School” to “Sankofa Charter School”) on May 31, 2007. The name change was effective on December 31, 2007 by operation of law.

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The final version of Institute renewal reports should be broadly shared by the school with the entire school community. This report will be posted on the Institute’s website at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm).

## **REPORT INTRODUCTION**

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) transmits to the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”) its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s Application for Renewal, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).<sup>2</sup>

Information about the State University’s renewal process, as well as an overview of the requirements for renewal under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (the “Act”), are available in the [Appendix](#) of this report. Note too that the Institute’s website provides additional details and resources regarding renewal, including: the Institute’s comprehensive *Charter Renewal Handbook*, at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm).

## **RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Recommendation:**

### **Non-Renewal**

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Trustees deny the Application for Renewal of the Sankofa Charter School, and not allow the school to provide any instruction beyond the 2007-08 school year.

### **Required Findings**

Based on the Charter Schools Institute’s review of the evidence that it gathered and that Sankofa Charter School has provided, the Institute cannot make the findings that the Act and State University Renewal Practices require including specifically that the school would improve student learning and achievement and be operated in an educationally and fiscally sound manner. The Institute instead finds that the personnel, programs and structures in place are not sufficient in terms of quantity or quality to make it likely that the school would meet or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals, even if the school qualified for more time (which it does not). Therefore, the Institute recommends to the State University Trustees that it deny the application for charter renewal submitted by the school and that the educational program of the school be closed at the end of the present school year (2007-08).

Pursuant to the foregoing recommendation, the school’s board of trustees will have no authority to provide instruction including, but not limited to, summer school, beyond the end of the 2007-08 school year.

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<sup>2</sup>The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at [www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org).

## **Consideration of School District Comments**

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the school district in which the charter school is located regarding the school's application for renewal. No comments were received in response.

## **Summary Discussion**

### *Academic Record*

During the charter period, Sankofa Charter School has not come close to meeting the key academic goals in English language arts and mathematics it set for itself in its Accountability Plan. A large majority of students have *not* attained proficiency on the New York State assessments in those subjects. In particular, in 2007, less than one-third of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders were proficient on the English language arts assessment, indicating that most of the students had not been prepared to, as the school's mission statement declares, "succeed in top quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond." While Sankofa outperformed the Buffalo City School District in mathematics in 2006 and 2007 (which is an extremely low bar) and in English language arts in 2006, it has consistently scored lower than predicted when compared to demographically-similar schools state-wide. Currently, the school is deemed to be In Need of Improvement – Year 1 in Elementary – Middle Level Mathematics under the State's No Child Left Behind accountability system. During the first four years of operation, the school partnered with the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) in order to institute the essential components outlined in its charter application. The school reached a crisis in the spring of 2007 when KIPP Foundation withdrew its licensing agreement primarily due to the school not meeting the KIPP academic performance measures, the school was placed on the "Schools In Need of Improvement" list by the State Education Department, the school leader resigned and the school's board of trustees considered closing the school.

Ultimately deciding to keep the school in operation, the school's board of trustees had to take action to address a number of critical issues, including the change to self-management. On April 29, 2007, the school's board of trustees, led by a newly appointed chair, presented to the Institute a Transition Plan (under the name Sankofa Charter School) enumerating the measures the school would take to provide the services previously provided by the KIPP Foundation, and to ensure that the school would offer an educationally and fiscally sound program. According to the renewal inspection visit interview with the school's board of trustees, the board hired an outside consultant to help develop the Transition Plan and, coinciding with the departure of the school leader, assist the school's transition in the short-term. In fact, over the last two months of the 2006-2007 school year, that consultant was instrumental in recruiting and hiring three new staff members to focus on the social and emotional needs of students. In July, 2007, the board appointed a new school leader and, throughout the summer and early fall, a majority of new board members.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit, numerous actions detailed in the Transition Plan had not been carried out. Specifically, strategic elements of the Transition Plan were *not* in place, including SRA Direct Instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers, Modern Curriculum Press for struggling math students, Scholastic leveled reading libraries, teacher training for differentiated instruction, a rubric to assess prospective teachers, before-school tutoring and enrichment programs provided by the Buffalo Urban League, and a student teaching partnership with Medaille College. The Read 180 program was not yet in use due to a delay in the arrival of the laptops necessary to implement the program. The school had neither implemented a clearly defined curricula for all

grades and subjects, nor put in place a process to ensure that curriculum is aligned with State standards.

Moreover, at the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school's curricular philosophy was unclear and appeared contradictory. The school's transition plan calls for the implementation of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB), a curricular approach through which much of the teaching and learning occurs by way of learning expeditions, long-term investigations of questions and subjects that include individual and group projects, field studies, and performances and presentations of student work. However, a draft of the school's Three-Year Academic Achievement Plan does not reference ELOB or project-based learning; the three-year plan maintains that the textbook-based McDougal-Littell learning will be the central component of the mathematics and English language arts programs. In line with that plan, the school purchased several new series of textbooks for the 2007-08 academic year with the expectation that teachers would primarily deliver instruction by way of textbook-based, rather than experiential, learning. At the same time, per the contract signed with ELOB on August 31, 2007, Sankofa teachers are scheduled to attend many off-site professional development sessions to learn how to implement ELOB's experiential teaching and learning approach.

Over the life of the charter, the school has collected assessment information on students, including results of statewide and school-specific exams. However, teachers have not used student assessment data to drive instruction, nor have school leaders used that information to modify the academic program or convey school-wide assessment outcomes to parents. Further, the school has not effectively used performance data to evaluate its progress towards meeting the goals it set for itself in its Accountability Plan.

Sankofa Charter School has not exhibited high quality instruction. Since its inception, teachers' lessons have not addressed a clear understanding of students' skills and knowledge, nor have teachers promoted academic rigor or students' higher order thinking skills. Teachers have not asked challenging questions to assess student learning and nor have they advanced student problem solving skills. High teacher turnover and an incoherent curriculum have exacerbated the generally poor quality of instruction. The school has not consistently implemented programs to help students who are struggling academically. For example, renewal visit inspectors found little evidence of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure. While services for students with disabilities have improved, targeted support for these students by their teachers in mainstream classrooms is lacking.

Throughout its existence, Sankofa has not benefited from strong instructional leadership. The school leadership has failed to accurately observe and analyze the quality of instruction, and to provide targeted improvement strategies with follow-up support. In its fifth year, Sankofa's new leadership has put in place an ongoing system for monitoring teacher effectiveness, yet does not provide substantive feedback to teachers on how to improve pedagogical techniques. There has been little coaching and modeling inside the classrooms, and the coaching that has been provided has not been provided in a sustainable manner, such as during professional development, common planning time or staff meetings. Additionally, school leaders gave overly optimistic appraisals of Sankofa's teaching and learning and seemed unable or unwilling to accurately ascertain the quality of teaching in the school.

Over the course of the charter, the school has provided a range of professional development activities; however, they have been inconsistent and have not constituted a coherent professional

development program. Moreover, professional development has not had a demonstrable impact on instruction. Despite the large numbers of teachers new to the school and teaching, new teachers did not report receiving any special training or guidance.

In its fifth year, Sankofa's greatest area of improvement has been in student order and discipline. In earlier years, the school's ability to maintain discipline and order varied. The new school leader has focused her efforts largely on building, in her words, a "family feeling" at Sankofa and creating "a more positive place." In addition, Sankofa has also prioritized the social and emotional needs of students through the hiring of a strong team of professionals, including a dean of students, parent liaison and social worker. As a result, as compared to Institute observations during the school's Fourth-Year Inspection Visit, at the time of the renewal inspection visit hallway behavior was quiet and orderly while adults and students treated each other with respect. Students, parents and teachers all spoke of a significant positive change in school climate.

Based on its review of the school's academic program during the Institute's renewal inspection visit conducted in October 2007, during the school's fifth year, the Institute is not able to find—as it must pursuant to the Act, and the criteria that the State University Trustees have set—that the programs and personnel in place were or are of sufficient strength to make it likely that the school, if renewed, would make substantial, meaningful and consistent progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals.

#### *Organizational Effectiveness and Viability*

From an organizational perspective, the school's board of trustees has experienced a high degree of turnover and amassed a record of internal struggle and conflicts in the first four years of the school's operation. To its credit, the current school board of trustees has exhibited a strength and unity previously foreign to the school. Unfortunately, the strength of the current board has not translated into tangible progress as related to the advancement of the education program on the ground at the school.

#### *Fiscal Soundness*

The school is currently in weak financial condition, although it has been generally stable throughout its existence. Recent events have put a strain on the school's overall position, which otherwise would have been characterized as stable. First, the increase in per-pupil revenue for Buffalo resident students was less than 1 percent this year, compared to an average increase of more than 6 percent in the three previous years. Second, the school's enrollment has decreased by about 35 students or 15 percent from last year. Third, although some cost savings were realized as part of the restructuring of the school, overall there were additional costs related to those activities. Also, although the school has no long-term debt, it is currently in default on a promissory note payable to KIPP Foundation for \$282,777 that was due March 1, 2007. The school simply does not have the cash flow to repay this amount in a lump sum and hopes therefore to negotiate a payment schedule.

The school has been timely in meeting its financial reporting requirements and such reporting has been complete and accurate with minor exceptions. The school has never been cited for any material financial or internal control weaknesses as part of its annual audits.

### *Plans for the Next Charter Period*

The Institute's review of the school's fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period identified significant challenges regarding enrollment and other areas. The school's weak financial condition, uncertain enrollment prospects, along with the continued changes taking place at the school, such as the restructuring of its finance operations, are each significant challenges that the school would need to overcome for it to move forward. The school has operated in a fiscally sound manner at higher enrollment levels, but in light of such significant fiscal challenges, it cannot be assumed that the school would have the capacity to meet or overcome them.

To the extent that Sankofa Charter School has not achieved its key academic goals, continues to implement an educational program that does not support achieving those goals, operates an ineffective organization, and is not fiscally sound, its plans to continue to implement the educational program as currently constituted for the next charter period do not appear to be reasonable, feasible or achievable.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“State University Trustees”) approved the application for KIPP Sankofa Charter School on February 25, 2003; the charter (certificate of incorporation) was subsequently issued by the Board of Regents on March 25, 2003. The school opened in September, 2003, serving 90 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, adding one grade per year, and, at the time of its renewal inspection visit in October of 2007, enrolled approximately 210 students in 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The school is located in a renovated, leased space at 140 Central Park Plaza in Buffalo, New York, a former gymnasium in a failed shopping center. The school’s original name was based on both the school model it followed during its first four years of operation, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), and Sankofa, an Akan word that means “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.”

The KIPP Sankofa Charter School submitted its original charter application in partnership with the KIPP Foundation, a California public benefit organization that currently serves in a similar capacity for several other charter schools in New York. On April 13, 2007, for reasons related to the school’s academic performance, the KIPP Foundation gave notice to the school, pursuant to its licensing agreement, that after the end of the 2006-2007 school year KIPP Sankofa Charter School would no longer be able to use the KIPP name or trademarks. On May 31, 2007, the State University Trustees granted the school’s request for a change in name as a charter revision. Post resubmission to the Board of Regents the name change became effective on December 31, 2007 by operation of law.

The initial mission statement for KIPP Sankofa Charter School read as follows:

*KIPP Sankofa’s sole mission is to provide educationally underserved middle school students with the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top-quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.*

The Executive Summary of the school’s original charter states, “An immediate goal for the school will be to send each and every graduate of KIPP Sankofa Charter School to a high school that is capable of preparing him/her to enroll in and successfully graduate from college.” KIPP Sankofa Charter School asserted that it would achieve its mission by: 1) utilizing many of the best teaching practices used in the already-successful KIPP schools across the United States; 2) implementing a rigorous curriculum designed to meet or exceed the New York State Board of Regents performance standards; and 3) upholding *KIPP’s Five Pillars* of high academic achievement that are the common core principles in all KIPP Schools, which consist of High Expectations, More Time on Task, Focus on Results, Power to Lead, and Choice and Commitment.

The original charter states, “Simply put, all staff members at KIPP Sankofa Charter School will make a commitment to do whatever it takes to ensure that all of its students graduate with the knowledge, skills, and character to succeed in top-quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.”

Key design elements proposed in the school’s Application for Renewal would be modified slightly from those outlined in the school’s Initial Application. Specifically, the school’s plans include implementing the following:

- a small school environment with a full-time parent/community liaison to build connections between the school and the community;

- a focus on results by benchmarking each student annually and providing academic enrichment and remediation daily;
- order and discipline by devoting time at the beginning of each school year to train the entire school in the consistent application of the discipline policy and behavior code and training teachers in classroom management;
- sound governance by expanding and training the board of trustees in policy and fiscal oversight; and,
- a culture of high expectations to prepare students for future successes.

**School Year (2007-08)**

200 Instructional Days<sup>1</sup>

**School Day (2007-08)**

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.<sup>2</sup>

**Enrollment**

	<b>Original Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Revised Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Actual Enrollment<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Original Chartered Grades</b>	<b>Revised Grades Served</b>	<b>Actual Grades Served</b>	<b>Complying</b>
<b>2003-04</b>	90	90	90	5	5	5	<b>YES</b>
<b>2004-05</b>	180	180	160	5-6	5-7	5-7	<b>YES</b>
<b>2005-06</b>	270	194	215	5-7	5-7	5-7	<b>YES</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	360	250	250	5-8	5-8	5-8	<b>YES</b>
<b>2007-08</b>	360	200	180	5-8	5-8	5-8	<b>YES</b>

<sup>1</sup> According to the school’s original charter, this total includes Saturday sessions held at least twice monthly and a mandatory one-month summer session. The 2007-08 school year does not include any Saturdays or summer instruction.

<sup>2</sup> 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. is used as a time for tutoring. This reflects changes to the program identified in the school’s renewal application.

<sup>3</sup> Enrollment figures per the Charter School’s Institute’s official enrollment table, which are reported by the school. Figures used to calculate students populations may differ depending on the date of data collection.

Race/Ethnicity	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District
American Indian or Alaska Native	0 %	2 %	2 %	1 %	NA	NA
Black or African American	97 %	58 %	95 %	57%	NA	NA
Hispanic	1 %	14 %	1 %	14%	NA	NA
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0 %	1 %	1 %	1 %	NA	NA
White	2 %	26 %	1 %	26 %	NA	NA

Source: 2004-2005, 2005-06: School Report Card (New York State Education Department); 2006-2007: New York State Education Department Database.

Special Populations	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District
Students with Disabilities	0 %	NA	7.5 %	NA	9.3 %	20.0 %
Limited English Proficient	0 %	7 %	0 %	7 %	0.0 %	6.5 %

Source: Students with Disabilities: Renewal Application - Statistical Overview (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07). Limited English Proficient: 2005-2006 New York State Education Department School Report Card (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07).

Free/Reduced Lunch	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District	% of Enroll. Sankofa	% of Enroll. Buffalo City District
Eligible for Free Lunch	66 %	67 %	61 %	67 %	75.8 %	65.4 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	14 %	10 %	16 %	10 %	16.5 %	7.6 %

Source: 2005-06 New York State Education Department School Report Card (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07).

### School Charter History

<b>Charter Year</b>	<b>School Year</b>	<b>Year of Operation</b>	<b>Evaluation Visit</b>	<b>Feedback to School</b>	<b>Other Actions Taken</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Charter – 1st Year	2003-04	1 <sup>st</sup>	YES	Prior Action Letter; End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
1 <sup>st</sup> Charter – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2004-05	2 <sup>nd</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
1 <sup>st</sup> Charter – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	2005-06	3 <sup>rd</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
1 <sup>st</sup> Charter – 4 <sup>th</sup> Year	2006-07	4 <sup>th</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	School's name was changed from KIPP Sankofa Charter School to Sankofa Charter School.
1 <sup>st</sup> Charter – 5 <sup>th</sup> Year	2007-08	5 <sup>th</sup>	YES	Initial Renewal Report	Recommended for Non-Renewal

## RENEWAL BENCHMARKS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	<b>Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</b>	
<b>Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment &amp; Improvement</b>	<b>1A.1</b>	<b>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.</b>
	<b>1A.2</b>	<b>Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</b>
	<b>1A.3</b>	<b>Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</b>
	<b>1A.4</b>	<b>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.</b>
	<b>1A.5</b>	<b>NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</b>

During the charter period, Sankofa Charter School has not come close to meeting the key academic goals in English language arts and mathematics it set for itself in its Accountability Plan. A large majority of students have not attained proficiency on the New York State assessments in those subjects. In particular, in 2007 less than one-third of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders were proficient on the English language arts assessment, indicating that most of them had not been prepared “to succeed in top quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.” While Sankofa outperformed the Buffalo City School District in mathematics in 2006 and 2007 and in English language arts in 2006, which are all extremely low bars considering Buffalo’s overall performance on the state exams, the school has consistently scored lower than predicted when compared to demographically-similar schools state-wide. Currently, the school is deemed to be In Need of Improvement – Year 1 in Elementary –Middle Level Mathematics under the State’s No Child Left Behind accountability system.

At the beginning of the charter period the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. For each goal, specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. These outcome measures include the following three types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) individual student growth based on year-to-year comparisons of grade level cohorts. The following table summarizes the outcome measures currently

required by the Institute for each subject area goal, as well as a measure for NCLB. Schools may have also elected to include additional optional measures for these goals in their Accountability Plan.

Summary of Required Outcome Measures in Elementary/Middle School (K-8) Accountability Plans					
GOAL	Required Outcome Measures				
	Absolute		Comparative		Value Added
	75 percent proficient on state exam	Performance Index (PI) meets Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)	Percent proficient greater than local school district	School exceeds its predicted level of performance compared to similar public schools by a small Effect Size	Grade-level cohorts reduce by half the gap between the previous year's percent proficient and 75 percent
English language arts	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Mathematics	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Science	◆		◆		
Social Studies	◆		◆		
NCLB	School is deemed in "Good Standing" under state's NCLB accountability system				

The following data and discussion address the outcome measures under each of these five goals. As the basis for determining if a school has met the goals, the results of the various required and optional outcome measures provide the framework for evaluating the school's academic success under this renewal benchmark. If the school's Accountability Plan did not include measures similar to those currently required by the Institute, outcomes related to those additional measures are presented as well. Bold numbers appearing in the tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was met in a given year.

### **English Language Arts**

**Accountability Plan Goal:** *All students at KIPP Sankofa Charter School<sup>4</sup> will become proficient readers and writers of the English language.*

**Accountability Plan Measures:** The school has not achieved its mathematics goal. In absolute terms, 37 percent of students scored at the proficient level on the state exam in 2005-06 and 40 percent were proficient in 2006-07. In 2005-06 the school performed the same as the Buffalo City School District and outperformed its comparison schools. The next year it outperformed the district and comparison schools. Again, this comparison is in the context of a low-performing district and a group of selected schools with lower family income. The comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, presented under additional measures on page 9, is more valid.

<sup>4</sup> The school is currently called Sankofa Charter School; however, at the time the Accountability Plan was developed the school's name was KIPP Sankofa Charter School.

In terms of year-to-year growth, in each of the last three years only one cohort achieved its target (there was only one cohort in 2004-05) on the Stanford 10 and overall the school was slightly below the national norm in the last two years. Examining performance on the New York State English language arts assessment, none of the school's three cohorts achieved their target last year; while there was growth overall, less than half of the students achieved proficiency.

<b>Absolute Measures</b>					
<b>Measure 1:</b> During the 5-year period of the charter, students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will score at levels 3 & 4 on the New York State English Language Arts assessment (ELA) at the following percentages:					
<b>Percentage of Students Scoring at Levels 3 &amp; 4 on the ELA Assessment</b>					
	<b>2003-04 SY</b>	<b>2004-05 SY</b>	<b>2005-06 SY</b>	<b>2006-07 SY</b>	<b>2007-08 SY</b>
<b>Grade 7</b>			65	65	65
<b>Grade 8</b>				75	75
<b>Results (in percents)</b>					
	<b>School Year</b>				
<b>Grade</b>	<b>2003-04 (N=0)</b>	<b>2004-05 (N=0)</b>	<b>2005-06<sup>5</sup> (N=27)</b>	<b>2006-07 (N=112)</b>	
<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	
<b>4</b>	-	-	-	-	
<b>5</b>	-	-	-	0.0	
<b>6</b>	-	-	-	32.4	
<b>7</b>	-	-	37.0 <sup>6</sup>	26.7	
<b>8</b>	-	-	-	28.9	
<b>All</b>	-	-	<b>37.0</b>	<b>28.6</b>	

<sup>5</sup> In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In prior years exams in these subjects were administered only in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

<sup>6</sup> Sankofa reported results for students who had been enrolled for two full years as opposed to students enrolled in their second year.

<b>Comparative Measures</b>				
<b>Measure 2:</b> Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, and for each of the remaining years of its charter, the KIPP Sankofa Charter School will have a higher performance index (PI) rating than Frank A. Sedita Community School (BPS 38), Pfc. William J. Grabiarz School of Excellence (BPS 79), Buffalo Public School 43, and Lincoln Academy (BPS 44) <sup>7</sup> and the Buffalo City School district on the New York State ELA. The comparison for all schools at the city school district will be grades 5-8.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b> (Grade 5-7)	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 5-8)
<b>School</b>	-	-	<b>102</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>District</b>	-	-	108	120
<b>BPS 38</b>	-	-	74	95
<b>BPS 79</b>	-	-	95	108
<b>BPS 43</b>	-	-	97	112

<b>Value-Added Measures</b>				
<b>Measure 3:</b> Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, cohorts of KIPP Sankofa students will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline or prior year's performance and grade level (NCE=50) on the Stanford 10 Total Reading Battery. By the end of grade 8, the cohort will be at 50 NCE. If the cohort's baseline exceeds an NCE score of 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Mean NCE on SAT 10</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b> (Grades 6) (N=29)	<b>2005-06</b> (Grades 6-7) (N=52)	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 6-8) (N=112)
Baseline	-	41.1	40.5	40.8
Target	-	45.6	45.4	45.4
Actual	-	44.7	42.1	41.0
Cohorts Made Target	-	<b>(0 of 1)</b>	<b>(0 of 2)</b>	<b>(0 of 3)</b>

<sup>7</sup> According to Sankofa, BPS 44 was converted into an alternative school so is no longer a comparison school.

**Measure 4:** Each year, all grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State ELA exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State ELA exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show a positive gain in the current year.<sup>8</sup>

<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Percent Level 3 &amp; 4 on NYSTP</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07 (Grades 6-8) (N=121)</b>
Baseline	-	-	-	23.1
Target	-	-	-	49.1
Actual	-	-	-	28.1
Cohorts Made	-	-	-	<b>(0 of 3)</b>
Target	-	-	-	

**Additional Measures:** In comparing the school's Performance Index to the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state, the school did not achieve this measure in 2005-06 and just met it in 2006-07. Looking at the percentage of students at proficiency on the New York State exam, in 2005-06 the school outperformed the local district; it failed to do so the following year. Finally, in comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, the school performed far worse than predicted in both years.

<b>Absolute Measures</b>				
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State ELA exam will meet that year's Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Index</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04 (N=0)</b>	<b>2004-05 (N=0)</b>	<b>2005-06 (N=214)</b>	<b>2006-07 (N=231)</b>
<b>PI</b>	-	-	<b>102</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>AMO</b>	123	131	122	122

<sup>8</sup> This is the Institute's currently required value-added measure. The school's Accountability Plan includes a different value-added measure which relies on scale scores. However, the state exams are not vertically aligned and thus scale scores cannot be compared year to year. Therefore the school has submitted in its Progress Reports and Renewal Application data that reflect the Institute's measure based on the percentage of students at Levels 3 and 4.

<b>Comparative Measures</b>				
Each year, the percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State ELA exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local school district.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b> (Grade 7)	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 6-8)
<b>School</b>	-	-	<b>37.0</b>	<b>28.6</b>
<b>District</b>	-	-	26.7	35.1
Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance on the State ELA exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Index</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b> (Grades 5-7) (N=214)	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 5-8) (N=231)
<b>Predicted</b>	-	-	47.3	42.1
<b>Actual</b>	-	-	24.0	26.8
<b>Effect Size</b>	-	-	<b>-1.16</b>	<b>-0.98</b>

## Mathematics

**Accountability Plan Goal:** *All students at KIPP Sankofa Charter School will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of mathematical computation and problem-solving.*

**Accountability Plan Measures:** The school has not achieved its mathematics goal. In absolute terms 37 percent of students scored at the proficient level on the state exam in 2005-06 and 40 percent were proficient in 2006-07. In 2005-06 the school performed the same as the district and outperformed its comparison schools. The next year it outperformed the district and comparison schools. In terms of growth, in each of the last three years only one cohort has achieved its target (there was only one cohort in 2004-05) and overall the school was slightly below the national norm in the last two years on the Stanford 10. Examining performance on the New York State mathematics assessment, none of the school's three cohorts achieved their target last year; while there was growth overall, less than half of the students achieved proficiency.

<b>Absolute Measures</b>					
During the 5-year period of the charter, students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will score at levels 3 & 4 on the New York State Math Assessment at the following percentages:					
<b>Percentage of Students Scoring at Levels 3 &amp; 4 on the Math Assessment</b>					
	<b>2003-04 SY</b>	<b>2004-05 SY</b>	<b>2005-06 SY</b>	<b>2006-07 SY</b>	<b>2007-08 SY</b>
<b>Grade 7</b>			65	65	65
<b>Grade 8</b>				75	75
<b>Results (in percents)</b>					
	<b>School Year</b>				
<b>Grade</b>	<b>2003-04 (N=0)</b>	<b>2004-05 (N=0)</b>	<b>2005-06<sup>9</sup> (N=27)</b>	<b>2006-07 (N=109)</b>	
<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	
<b>4</b>	-	-	-	-	
<b>5</b>	-	-	-	0.0	
<b>6</b>	-	-	-	34.3	
<b>7</b>	-	-	37.0	33.3	
<b>8</b>	-	-	-	50.0	
<b>All</b>	-	-	<b>37.0</b>	<b>40.4</b>	

<b>Comparative Measures</b>				
Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, and for each of the remaining years of its charter, the KIPP Sankofa Charter School will have a higher performance index (PI) rating than Frank A. Sedita Community School (BPS 38), Pfc. William J. Grabiarz School of Excellence (BPS 79), Buffalo Public School 43, and Lincoln Academy (BPS 44) <sup>10</sup> and the Buffalo City School district on the New York State Math Assessment. The comparison for all schools at the city school district will be grades 5-8.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
	<b>School Year</b>			
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06 (Grade 5-7)</b>	<b>2006-07 (Grades 5-8)</b>
<b>School</b>	-	-	<b>86</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>District</b>	-	-	86	107
<b>BPS 38</b>	-	-	48	82
<b>BPS 79</b>	-	-	71	100
<b>BPS 43</b>	-	-	79	99

<sup>9</sup> In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Prior to that, assessments in these subjects were administered only in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

<sup>10</sup> According to Sankofa, BPS 44 was converted into an alternative school so is no longer a comparison school.

<b>Value-Added Measures</b>				
Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, cohorts of the school's students will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline or prior year's performance and grade level (NCE=50) on the Stanford 10 Math Battery. By the end of grade 8, the cohort will be at 50 NCE. If the cohort's baseline exceeds an NCE score of 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Mean NCE on SAT 10</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b> (Grades 6) (N=29)	<b>2005-06</b> (Grades 6-7) (N=52)	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 6-8) (N=112)
Baseline	-	47.7	51.4	46.1
Target	-	48.8	51.5	48.0
Actual	-	54.3	47.8	49.1
Cohorts Made Target	-	<b>(1 of 1)</b>	<b>(1 of 2)</b>	<b>(1 of 3)</b>
Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, cohorts of the school's students will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline or prior year's performance and the eighth grade "proficient" performance level (in scale score) on the state Math assessment. By the end of grade 8, the cohort will be at the proficient scale score (scale score equivalent to level 3). If a cohort's baseline scaled score exceeds the equivalent of scoring at the proficient performance level on the eighth grade Math assessment, it will be expected to show an increase of ten scaled score points.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Percent Level 3 &amp; 4 on NYSTP</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07</b> (Grades 6-8) (N=118)
Baseline	-	-	-	25.4
Target	-	-	-	50.2
Actual	-	-	-	41.5
Cohorts Made Target	-	-	-	<b>(0 of 3)</b>

**Additional Measures:** In 2005-06 the school just met the AMO set by the state, and the following year it surpassed it. Comparing the percentages of students at proficiency, the school has outperformed the district in both years. However, in comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, the school has performed far worse than predicted.

Absolute Measures				
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State mathematics exam will meet that year's Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=199)	2006-07 (N=225)
PI	-	-	86	128
AMO	136	142	86	86

Comparative Measures				
Each year, the percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State mathematics exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local school district.				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 7)	2006-07 (Grades 6-8)
School	-	-	37.0	40.4
District	-	-	22.5	30.7

Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance on the State mathematics exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grades 5-7) (N=199)	2006-07 (Grades 5-8) (N=225)
Predicted	-	-	48.1	50.3
Actual	-	-	20.6	39.1
Effect Size	-	-	-1.17	-0.55

## Science

**Accountability Plan Goal:** *All students at KIPP Sankofa Charter School will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning and problem-solving.*

**Accountability Plan Measures:** The school has not achieved its science goal. 2006-07 was the first year the school had a state testing grade in science. That year 24 percent of students scored at the proficient level on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade State assessment. Comparison data for the district and comparison schools are not available.

Absolute Measures				
During the 5-year period of the charter, 75% of the students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will score at levels 3 & 4 on the eighth grade New York State Science assessment.				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=0)	2006-07 (N=58)
8	-	-	-	24.1

Comparative Measures				
Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, and for each of the remaining years of its charter, the KIPP Sankofa Charter School will have a greater percent of students at Levels 3 & 4 than Frank A. Sedita Community School (BPS 38), Pfc. William J. Grabiarz School of Excellence (BPS 79), Buffalo Public School 43, and Lincoln Academy (BPS 44) and the Buffalo City School district on the eighth grade New York State Science assessment.				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (Grade 8)
School	-	-	-	24.1
District	-	-	-	NA
BPS 38	-	-	-	NA
BPS 79	-	-	-	NA
BPS 43	-	-	-	NA

## Social Studies

**Accountability Plan Goal:** *All students at KIPP Sankofa Charter School will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of social, geographical, civic, and world studies.*

**Accountability Plan Measures:** The school has not met its social studies goal. 2006-07 was the first year the school had a state testing grade in this subject. That year 13 percent of students scored at the proficient level on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade State assessment. Comparison data for the district and comparison schools are not available.

Absolute Measures				
During the 5-year period of the charter, 75 percent of the students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will score at levels 3 & 4 on the eighth grade New York State Social Studies assessment.				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=0)	2006-07 (N=60)
8	-	-	-	13.3

<b>Comparative Measures</b>				
Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, and for each of the remaining years of its charter, the KIPP Sankofa Charter School will have a greater percent of students at Levels 3 & 4 than Frank A. Sedita Community School (BPS 38), Pfc. William J. Grabiarz School of Excellence (BPS 79), Buffalo Public School 43, and Lincoln Academy (BPS 44) and the Buffalo City School district on the New York State eighth grade Social Studies assessment.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Comparison</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07 (Grade 8)</b>
<b>School</b>	-	-	-	<b>13.3</b>
<b>District</b>	-	-	-	NA
<b>BPS 38</b>	-	-	-	NA
<b>BPS 79</b>	-	-	-	NA
<b>BPS 43</b>	-	-	-	NA

### NCLB

In addition to meeting its specific subject area goals, the school is expected under No Child Left Behind to made adequate yearly progress towards enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and mathematics assessments. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues an annual school accountability report that indicates the school's status each year.

**Accountability Plan Measures:** In 2006-07 the state deemed the school "In Need of Improvement – Year 1" because it failed to make adequate year progress in Elementary –Middle Level Mathematics. As a result, the school did not meet this goal.

<b>Absolute Measures</b>				
Under the state's NCLB accountability system, the school's Accountability Status will be "Good Standing" each year.				
<b>Results (in percents)</b>				
<b>Status</b>	<b>School Year</b>			
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07</b>
<b>Good Standing</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

<p><b>Benchmark 1B</b></p> <p><b>Use of Assessment Data</b></p>	<p><b>1B</b></p> <p><b>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></p>
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Over the first charter term, Sankofa Charter School has collected assessment information on student performance; however, the school has not used the information to drive instruction or modify the academic program. In its second year (as noted in the Institute’s Second-Year Inspection Report), teachers reported that they had worked to improve their means for assessing and tracking student performance, and that teachers administered weekly assessments. In the school’s third year, it was not apparent to inspection team members whether teachers were using the data from the weekly assessments to re-teach the concepts that students had not grasped (as noted in the Third-Year Inspection Report which, according to standard Institute practice, is conducted by an external evaluation team under contract to the Institute). When interviewed during the Institute’s Fourth-Year Inspection Visit, teachers indicated that lesson plans and subsequent instruction were not generally informed by assessment data.

According to interviews conducted at the time of the recent renewal inspection visit, teachers make minimal use of assessment data to prioritize curricular decisions, improve instruction and create targeted remedial programs. Aside from some 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who requested that textbooks be replaced based on the STAR results and a general awareness of some skill deficiencies based on the state practice tests’ item analyses, teachers do not use standardized test outcomes to make curricular decisions. Also, with the exception of 5<sup>th</sup> grade, teachers do not group students for remedial instruction or provide individually targeted interventions based on assessment data. Further, there is limited evidence that teachers use in-class unit assessment information for re-teaching. For example, with the exception of one teacher, Sankofa Charter School teachers indicated that they closely follow the mathematics textbook pacing guide provided by McDougall-Littel and did not indicate making any changes based on assessment data.

Notably, at the time of the renewal inspection visit, teachers were largely unaware of the school’s Accountability Plan goals. According to evidence collected during interviews, teachers did not use assessment data to determine accurately whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved. In interviews, no teachers were able to ascertain, based on state- or school-specific assessments, whether specific school accountability measures were being met. When asked whether they had heard any specific progress reports from school leadership in terms of the school’s progress in meeting the Plan’s accountability measures, no teachers indicated they had received any such progress reports. When one teacher was asked about the Accountability Plan goals, she said, “Exactly how high is the basket we are shooting for? I don’t know. We are just supposed to push up scores, I think.”

Historically, Sankofa’s instructional leaders have not used student assessment results to inform the school’s academic program. In the fourth year of the charter, the Institute determined that the school’s 2006 Accountability Plan Progress Report, for which school leaders are ultimately responsible, failed to adequately evaluate the student performance results or to sufficiently discuss specific implications for the school’s academic program. Qualitative data collected during the fourth year inspection visit suggested that this pattern bore out in the day-to-day practice of the school. For example, most interviewed teachers noted a lack of instructional leadership in using either externally or internally collected assessment data. Also, they indicated that there were no coordinated efforts

within departments, across departments, or within grade levels to continue the work initiated during summer professional development workshops on using assessment data to inform instruction. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school leadership required teachers to generate action plans, based on itemized student performance data on the State's English language arts and mathematics assessments, to ensure that the teachers address the skills in which their respective classes were particularly weak. It is not clear, however, that the leadership had determined the alignment of teacher action plans with the state exams or had monitored the implementation of the plans. Further, there were no teacher reports of the school leadership delivering instructional guidance regarding teachers' lesson planning or actual instruction based on school leaders' review of assessment data. In fact, no interviewed teacher could reference a school leader using specific school-wide targets or goals (percentages, scores, specific content or process learning) in their conversations about pedagogy. The teachers did not perceive school leaders with the capacity to provide effective, in-depth coaching on using data to inform instruction.

Additionally, school leaders have not regularly communicated school-wide state assessment outcomes to parents, leaving them unaware of the poor academic performance of their school over the term of the charter. In a parent focus group during the renewal inspection visit, parents indicated that in past years they had not been made aware of the overall school performance on State exams. Parents stated that the previous school leadership only shared information about their individual child(ren)'s performance. In response to this point in a draft of this report, the school leader indicated that since her appointment (summer 2007) parents have received both written and oral communication about the school's academic standing as well as information regarding the importance and interpretation of the New York State assessments.

<b>Benchmark 1C</b> <b>Curriculum</b>	<b>1C</b> <b>The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</b>
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In the first four years of the charter there was no coherent, clearly defined curricula aligned with state standards – a trend noted by inspectors present at the school during its third and fourth years of operation. At those times, individual teachers were responsible for developing their own curriculum and pacing guides, a problem exacerbated by teacher turnover and inexperience.

Relative to previous years, there was more curricular coherence in the school’s fifth year, due primarily to the arrival of new commercial materials. For example, most mathematics teachers indicated they were following the sequence of the McDougall Littell materials, e.g., students were observed using consumable Guided Notes books aligned to overhead transparencies in which they fill in blanks with key terms and concepts and Practice Workbooks with problems. However, the school has still not defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve in each grade and core academic subject, and in practice there is still no clearly identifiable curriculum for all subjects and all grades. For example, at the time of the renewal inspection visit, no English language arts commercial programs were fully implemented. An English language arts teacher spoke highly of McDougal Littell materials, for which she received training during the summer, but reported that she is the only teacher who would be using that curriculum series this academic year. Additionally, there exists a foreign language scope and sequence based on state standards and textbooks, but in practice the teacher could not distinguish clearly between what lower and upper grade students needed to know and be able to do. The art teacher reported deriving his lessons from New York State Art Teacher’s Association resources and materials that he had acquired during graduate school. Curricula for music and family and consumer sciences classes are a collection of topics reflecting the teacher’s personal interests, beliefs and preferences rather than State standards.

Further, in the school’s fifth year of operation there remains no systematic curriculum review and development process to align the materials with the standards, and to establish alignment across materials and grade levels. For example, when school leaders and teachers were asked in interviews whether the school had undertaken a process of ensuring the curricula is tied to New York State standards, rather than the school conducting a thorough gap analysis between various commercial curricula and state standards, curricula purchasing decisions were based largely on the textbook companies’ assertions of alignment with standards. Furthermore, fifth grade teachers acknowledged that the current scope and sequences are not well developed and that next school year teachers plan to revise them based on what they teach this year. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school has yet not implemented a clearly defined curricula for all grades and subjects, nor has there been a process in place to ensure that curriculum is aligned with State standards.

The school has also failed to implement the curriculum identified in the school’s Transition Plan. For example, the Transition Plan states that the school will use SRA Direct Instruction for students struggling with decoding and fluency, Read 180 for students struggling with comprehension and decoding, and Scholastic Leveled Libraries to ensure grade-appropriate reading materials; however, at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, none of those measures were fully in place. At the time of the visit, the 30 laptops needed for the Read 180 program had not yet arrived and therefore the program was not fully implemented. (Subsequent to the visit, the school leader reported that the

program had been implemented.) Moreover, at the time of the visit, the school's curricular philosophy was unclear and appeared contradictory.

However, the school has begun to implement the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB), a program based upon a curricular approach through which much of the teaching and learning occurs by way of learning expeditions, long-term investigations of questions and subjects that include individual and group projects, field studies, and performances and presentations of student work. Still, a draft of the school's Three-Year Academic Achievement Plan does not reference ELOB or project-based learning; instead, the three-year plan maintains that textbook-based learning using McDougal-Littell materials will be the central component of the mathematics and English language arts programs. In line with that plan, the school purchased several new series of textbooks for the 2007-08 academic year with the expectation of teachers primarily delivering instruction by way of textbook-based, rather than experiential learning. At the same time, per the contract signed with ELOB on August 31, 2007, Sankofa teachers are scheduled to attend many off-site professional development sessions to learn how to implement ELOB's experiential teaching and learning approach. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, school leaders failed to articulate a clear plan for the integration of the ELOB program with the textbook approach.

In response to these points in a draft of this report, the school leader indicated that Sankofa is transitioning to the ELOB model. According to the school leader, the ELOB approach observed at the time of the visit is the model used for a start-up partner school and the program incorporates textbooks into instruction. She reported that the actual learning expeditions are not expected to be implemented until four to five years into the program. However, although this information is helpful, as indicated above, the school is yet without a clear plan for the integration of the ELOB program with the school's current textbook program.

<b>Benchmark 1D</b>	<b>1D.1</b>	<b>The school has strong instructional leadership.</b>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>1D.2</b>	<b>High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</b>
	<b>1D.3</b>	<b>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.</b>

Over the term of the charter, Sankofa Charter School has not benefited from strong instructional leadership. School leaders have failed to adequately observe and analyze the quality of instruction, provide targeted improvement strategies with follow-up support, and coach and model inside the classrooms.

In the early years of the charter period, school leaders often found themselves required to cover classes for extended periods of time, negatively impacting their ability to function as instructional leaders. For example, during much of the second year of operation, after attempts to secure a competent substitute teacher failed, the principal served as a substitute teacher for a vacant mathematics position. Given the school leader’s classroom responsibilities, the school did not fully evaluate teacher performance nor devote sufficient time to coaching teachers, hiring new staff, and developing additional instructional leadership internally. As a result the principal acknowledged that feedback to teachers had been a ‘weak spot.’ In the school’s third year, school leaders had yet to establish clear guidelines to help teachers improve the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school and, though coaching was provided, it was unclear how it was affecting instruction and teaching and learning. Continuing to be consumed with their classroom teaching responsibilities in the fourth year, school leaders had not planned for, or provided, ongoing professional development dedicated to improving specific instructional techniques.

In the school’s fifth year, despite a letter from the Institute in year four indicating that the school’s charter renewal was in jeopardy due to poor academic performance, the school still lacked a sense of urgency with regard to improving the school’s academic program. The new school leader has chosen to focus her efforts largely on building a family feeling at Sankofa, rather than on improving teaching and learning, leaving that responsibility largely to a chief academic officer (CAO) with little expertise or training in instructional leadership. In response to a draft of this report, the school leader stated that she has developed and is refining a rubric to assess prospective teachers.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit, it appeared that the school had begun to put in place some critical elements to monitor the school’s academic program. For example, the CAO developed an ongoing system for monitoring teacher effectiveness, however teachers stated that feedback from the

chief academic officer and dean of students tended to focus on classroom management strategies as opposed to suggestions on how to specifically to improve the efficacy of their instruction.<sup>11</sup> Teachers reported that the feedback regarding instructional activities is generally positive. Notwithstanding these efforts, there is limited evidence that teachers receive adequate critique on the quality of their teaching or specific strategies for improving their pedagogical techniques. Finally, teachers, rather than school leaders, created teacher-specific improvement plans—a worthy goal for any school staff, but Sankofa’s inexperienced teaching staff did not appear to have the expertise nor experience to prioritize or address key instructional issues.

School leaders’ appraisals of Sankofa’s teaching and learning appeared overly positive to school inspectors given the weak level of academic performance and poor quality of instruction observed in several classrooms. For example, a school leader stated that she is “90% pleased with what teachers are doing.” When asked for her appraisal of the school, one school leader said the school is “in the middle ... not very bad and not very good.” Similarly, when describing her observations of classrooms, a school leader stated that in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades “lessons are engaging,” and that the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts and social studies programs are “phenomenal ... kids are totally engaged and motivated.” As evidenced in subsequent sections in this report, students were not observed to be sufficiently engaged, nor were many engaged in activities promoting higher order thinking skills.

Further, more substantive coaching and modeling has not been targeted in a sustained way in professional development, common planning time or staff meetings. For instance, at the time of the renewal inspection visit, ELOB staff developers reportedly spent time in classrooms but did not provide significant in-class coaching and modeling; moreover, ELOB staff primarily gave feedback to the CAO on observed teaching and learning rather than directly to teachers themselves.

Sankofa has also suffered from high teacher turnover that school leaders have been unable to mitigate. As aforementioned, in previous years high teacher turnover led to school administrators being unable to perform their instructional leadership responsibilities due to the need to substitute teach. In the school’s fourth academic year, the principal noted that in 2006-07, as in previous years, “teacher attrition has been a major issue.” During the 2006-07 school year, students at all grade levels had multiple teachers in at least two subject areas. For example, the school’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade students had four English teachers, three science teachers, and two social studies teachers over the course of one academic year. This turnover in core content areas is in addition to the departures of two gym teachers and two art teachers. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, eight of the 17 teachers were new to the school, and an additional four teachers had only taught at Sankofa for less than six months. Thus, only five teachers were “veteran” teachers in the school having been there between eight months and two years, and one teacher with a tenure of four years. Four teachers had, for reasons such as illness, certification and poor performance, left since September, one left the school the day prior to the Institute’s visit and another teacher left the school during the Institute’s visit.

In the school’s fifth year, the problem of teacher instability is compounded by a relatively less rigorous teacher hiring process. In its fourth year, Sankofa had a consistent and multi-phased hiring process that included an online application, phone interview, demonstration lesson and debrief, and a

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<sup>11</sup> Teachers described the kind of feedback they receive as general, often focusing on non-instructional issues such as: “I learned that I veer to the left of the room;” “I’m not aware of the entire room;” and “I’m good at the classroom staying quiet.” In a review of teacher observation forms, similar comments were made across the forms at specific times of year, indicating a lack of feedback tailored to the individual needs of teachers.

second interview. With the exception of one teacher, all teacher hires underwent this process last year. However, in the school's fifth year there was a relatively less rigorous hiring process for teachers. During the 2007-08 year there was no demonstration lesson (with the exception of one teacher) or second interview. One of the school leaders reported that a rubric to assess prospective hires had not yet been developed. According to one teacher interviewed recently, current teacher turnover is the result of school leaders "picking the wrong people."

Over the life of the charter, Sankofa's teachers have generally not exhibited high quality instruction nor have the teachers' lessons demonstrated a clear understanding of students' skills and knowledge. In the school's third year, classroom observations showed that the overall quality of instruction was uneven, with only a few teachers demonstrating effective practice. In the classrooms in which teachers did not consistently demonstrate effective practice, teaching was usually teacher-led whole group instruction. By failing to effectively monitor students' understanding of skills and concepts, these teachers were unable to adjust their instructional approach to better support students. In the school's fourth year, inspectors observed consistent use of the KIPP lesson design. However, inspectors did not find evidence of a common, substantive and effective approach to lesson delivery across grade levels and content areas. Additionally, in many classrooms, the teachers' student management skills were weak and often impeded well intentioned instructional activities.

Sankofa's teachers have not promoted academic rigor or students' higher order thinking skills. For example, in the school's third year, teachers relied primarily on worksheets to assess and evaluate student academic progress. All the worksheets required students to engage in rote learning and did not engage them in higher-order thinking and advanced problem solving. Further, the overall quality of student work at KIPP Sankofa was usually low. Students handed in assignments that had numerous spelling and grammatical errors and gave one-word answers to comprehension questions. Teachers and school administrators did not seem to have a common understanding of high expectations for student performance. In the school's fourth year, as observed during the Institute's visit, many teachers expected and accepted low quality work from students, either submitted or displayed. Most teacher questions sought rote responses and the answers received to questions were often only partially correct. Even when classroom observations reflected a lack of student understanding, few teachers were observed re-teaching content or skills.

These trends continued at the time of the renewal inspection visit. For instance, in a survey of ten classes, an inspector found that eight teachers had written an aim on the board; however, almost all aims were instructional activities rather than learning outcomes tied to students' actual level of performance. Examples of aims as activities on the board in classrooms were: "describe the Northeast coast;" "use inferences to make predictions;" "solving equations;" "to review mean, mode, median, and range;" and "to graph rates." Further, many students did not demonstrate mastery of basic skills. For example, in the observed mathematics classes, especially in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, many students struggled to complete basic "Do Now" problems on the board and did not demonstrate conceptual understanding of the procedures they were trying to implement. In an upper grade mathematics class, students were guessing at steps to take to solve one variable equation (e.g.,  $12k + 7 = 31$ ). The teacher did not appear to recognize the skill deficit of his students and continued reviewing problems instead of teaching the concept the students needed to know.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the majority of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics and English "labs" were taught by teachers outside their subject matter expertise. Students are collectively assigned labs, which constitute a daily additional class period block for each subject, beyond the period taught by the primary content teacher. These classes represent a significant

amount of time designated for additional learning in critical subject areas in which the majority of students are not proficient. Yet these classes were generally follow-ups to the “main” classes taught by the regular content teachers. Lab teachers proctored worksheet completion and conducted drill work without the training or subject area expertise to offer alternative opportunities for learning or remediation. In four labs observed by an inspector, only one had active teacher interaction with the content; the rest of the teachers were using drill sheets with teachers reading off answers at the end of the class period.

In the school’s fifth year, lessons emphasized procedural knowledge and isolated basic skills over conceptual understandings and higher-order thinking. Teachers did not ask challenging questions to assess student learning and provoke student problem solving skills. Consider the following observations of one inspector’s analysis after observing ten classes.

There were very few, if any, teachers who focused on sustained, thoughtful, generative intellectual work. Reading was only for the purpose of filling out worksheets and answering low level questions. Discussion of ideas or making predictions or inferences was minimal and tightly bounded by teacher control and correction. Only in two classes were small groups observed and students were all filling out the same worksheet forms. Student writing work was short and constrained, most with teacher chosen topics. No sustained time to write about student-generated topics, with a focus on fluency and development of idea over mechanical correctness, was observed in any class. Skills were taught out of context, with the exception of one English language arts lesson, in which students were asked to immediately apply the new skill in their own stories.

That analysis is corroborated by the observations of another renewal visit inspector. In a survey of instructional activity over a 30-minute time span, seven out of ten teachers did not engage students with probing questions, except for essentially asking, “What is your answer to the next question in the workbook?” Few teachers challenged individual students or the class as a whole through discussion to think critically about the deeper meaning of the material; instead, teachers let students answer simple, fact-based questions. Specifically, one teacher had the class reading silently and completing individual work at their desks while she circled the room to ensure order, without taking advantage of the opportunity to observe student understanding and encourage and work with individual students to analyze the text. Rather than instill analysis and class-wide debate of the subject matter, two teachers were observed having students copy worksheet problems onto the board and complete the answers while the rest of the class sat idly by. Reflective of many other classes, rather than eliciting students to develop and analyze their own answers, two teachers were explicitly directing students on how to complete the workbook items and answer them correctly. In two other classes, one teacher was showing nature slides and having students take turns reading the captions with no discussion or apparent purpose while the other teacher had given an assignment for students to practice their keyboard techniques and then monitored classroom order, missing the opportunity to work with students individually.

Inspectors did note that overall the quality of instruction was much stronger in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades as opposed to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. However, in all classrooms, the predominant mode of instruction was whole-group, teacher-directed and textbook-driven. Teachers demonstrated a limited repertoire of effective teaching strategies for meeting the academic needs of all their students.

Throughout the school’s early years, the extent to which the school met the needs of at-risk students varied. In 2005-06, team members did not observe teachers’ consistent use of alternate teaching strategies to support at-risk learners in the classes they visited. Yet in the same year, there were some targeted interventions to meet individual students’ academic needs, including the creation of advanced mathematics and English language arts classes. In 2006-07, Institute visitors again

observed that there were inadequate systematic supports in place for at-risk students at the school. Many teachers expressed frustration that there was no time in the day to re-teach or tutor students who needed remediation. A special school-wide block created to prepare students to take state exams, “HEAT,” was the primary method for addressing deficiencies in student skill or content knowledge in relation to state performance standards. However, the instructional potential of HEAT had not been maximized. For example, the teachers relied almost exclusively on drilling students in test prep books during HEAT rather than developing a cohesive curriculum for all teachers to use to guide instruction.

In its fifth year, Sankofa did not have coherent programs, aside from special education services, to help students who are struggling academically. The school had allocated time and staff intended for support and remediation; however, there was no clear understanding of its purpose and as a result scheduled remediation periods were used for a variety of activities, including collective test prep, study hall and general review, rather than as targeted interventions to meet individual students’ academic needs. For example, Academic Intervention Service (AIS) was initially designed to be a period to meet students’ individual academic needs. As stated by one of the school leaders, the goal of AIS is to deliver individualized student academic interventions. But, at the time of the visit, individual students’ needs were not met in AIS; school inspectors observed that whole group instruction occurred during AIS to prepare for the English language arts state examination. For 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, one veteran teacher was observed modeling what other teachers should be doing when they are in their classrooms using the Coach test prep books. The mode of instruction was whole group using the test prep materials. There was no evidence that teachers were able to modify the materials or pacing to meet the different academic needs of the individual students they were working with during AIS. Similarly, English language arts and mathematics labs are used for a variety of activities which generally focus on whole class instruction rather than meeting individual students’ needs.

The Transition Plan identified the Buffalo Urban League, a community-based organization, as the provider of before-school and enrichment programs; however, the League was unable to do so. Therefore, the school is providing after-school tutoring and enrichment opportunities through fine arts activities (a play/musical), basketball and drumming. The school was in the process of implementing a Read 180 program for 60 students; however, since the program was not in operation at the time of the visit, inspectors could not determine its effectiveness.

In the school’s fifth year of operation, Sankofa improved its special education program. Specifically, the school has hired two full-time special education teachers who noted developing an effective relationship with Buffalo Public Schools that allows for an efficient evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) development process. Special education teachers are able to work both with students who require services per their IEPs, as well as other students who they observe in need of extra help, which, according to teachers, helps reduce stigmatizing the students with disabilities. However, despite the work of these special education teachers, the general education teachers had not received training working with students with disabilities in their classrooms and no targeted work with students with disabilities on the part of mainstream teachers was observed. One teacher stated: “I really have no idea what to do with a few of my really low kids. I know the special education teacher is supposed to help and comes into English language arts classes, but what do I do with them? I know they are just drifting.” In a response to a draft of this report, the school leader indicated that the special education teachers are working with teachers during planning time to develop inclusion strategies for individual students.

<b>Benchmark 1E</b>	
<b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b>	<b>1E      The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</b>

Over the charter period student order and discipline at Sankofa Charter School varied substantially but at the time of the renewal inspection visit, student order and discipline had improved, and the school’s culture now provided opportunities for learning.

In its second year, the climate at the school conveyed a sense of academic purpose and an underpinning of order; however, teachers exerted considerable effort to maintain order and focus to the detriment of teaching and learning. In the school’s third year, the environment was relatively more conducive to learning. There were well-established routines in each class, student behavior was not a significant issue and, in general, students felt safe. However, there was a marked change in year four. The school’s ability to maintain discipline and order was less apparent. Although the school implemented a character development and school-wide classroom management behavior system, including numerous opportunities for the de-escalation of student behavior, multiple points of evidence suggested that the effectiveness of this system was questionable. For example, the school had a high number of daily student referrals to the office (12-25 per day) and a high number of student suspensions incurred that school year (approximately 265). Student focus groups reported concerns about fighting with staff and disrespecting teachers, and, at the time of the visit, inspectors noted wide variation in teachers’ abilities to maintain order.

In the fifth year of the school’s charter, in comparison to the fourth year, student order and discipline had improved. According to the dean of students, this was primarily due to efforts by the chief educational officer (CEO) and teachers feeling “supported from the top down.” In fact, there were just eleven suspensions after the first two months of the school year. Additionally, there was a written policy to which all students and teachers have regular and consistent access. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, students spoke clearly of the policy and understood it. Teachers also spoke of a significant change in school climate from the previous year. Hallway behavior was quiet and orderly while adults were always present and spoke respectfully to students. Parents also noted the change; one parent characterized the school this way: “a different feel, they [staff members] have control, there’s learning going on.” In a focus group of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, two-thirds of whom attended the school since 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the students concurred: “The school is way different with him [the dean of students] here ... Last year kids ran over the teachers ... Last year the school didn’t enforce the rules. This year the rules are enforced ... and the rules are clear to students and given to kids in their agendas.” Classroom management techniques and daily routines created a climate of order in core academic classrooms in the lower grades, though the higher grades did not consistently exhibit a climate of order. For example, in a number of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes, low level misbehavior was tolerated, and in some classes inspectors observed students not on task and being rude and disruptive.

Sankofa has also prioritized the social and emotional needs of students through a strong team of professionals consisting of the dean of students, parent liaison and social worker. The dean of students described his role, in part, as one of emotional support and “big brother” while the parent liaison understands her role as “big sister.” The parent liaison described herself as part of a larger team which focuses on making the school more emotionally accommodating to students. For

instance, in the case of a parent who articulated issues that may affect a student's mental health (depression, divorcing parents, changes in household, etc.), the parent liaison refers the student to the social worker. In the words of the parent liaison, "kids genuinely see that [the social worker and dean of students] and I care – a lot of kids don't get that at home so [we work to make] this a 'safe haven' for some of these kids."

<b>Benchmark 1F</b>  <b>Professional Development</b>	<b>1F</b>	<b>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.</b>
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Over the course of the charter, professional development activities have been inconsistent and have not reflected a coherent professional development program. Moreover, professional development has not had a demonstrable impact on instruction.

Because of extreme demands on the principal’s time during the school’s second year of operation, there were limited opportunities for instructional coaching to assist teachers in improving their practice. At that time the principal relied on teachers to be “self-sufficient professionals with their own professional knowledge” goading inspectors to be mindful that the school had a relatively novice staff who had limited opportunities for feedback, professional development, and coaching. In its fourth year, according to interviews and inspectors’ observations, the school’s sophistication regarding teacher professional practice had deteriorated from previous years. Professional development topics seemed to be planned in an ad-hoc manner. Based on the previous year’s assessment data, the school had identified a need to focus on improving teaching and learning on English language arts in general and had provided professional development to its teachers in that area. However, there was no evidence to suggest that specific weaknesses in the program were identified as foci for professional development initiatives. Instead, the school appeared to have provided teachers with a buffet of offerings that were not aligned to student deficiencies in skill and content knowledge.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit, Sankofa’s off- and on-site professional development opportunities still failed to constitute a coherent plan with clearly prioritized professional development goals and activities based on the school’s identified needs. Early in the current school year numerous representatives from curriculum companies provided training on the curricula materials, including McDougal-Littell and Delta. The school also engaged a consultant to provide an on-site professional development session on reading instruction. The week following the Institute’s renewal inspection visit, still another consultant was scheduled to provide on-site professional development regarding how to teach to diverse student populations. In addition, school leaders encourage teachers to attend off-site Western New York Educational Service Council professional development seminars. Although some teachers found these professional development activities useful, they had not clearly positively impacted the quality of instruction nor did they represent a coherent program.

The school has attempted to implement sustained professional development through Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). A contract was established on August 31, 2007 with ELOB to provide thirty (later increased to thirty-five) on-site trainings this academic year. However, by the time of the renewal inspection visit, over half of all ELOB’s on-site professional development sessions had been focused on promoting elements of school culture and teamwork rather than pedagogy. ELOB had devoted one day of on-site professional development to conducting a needs assessment using previous state performance assessments. But ELOB was not scheduled to return to Sankofa until late November to hold a session on using data to inform instruction. In response to a draft of this report, the school leader indicated that ELOB has provided teacher training in differentiated instruction and will do an additional session in the Spring of 2008.

Despite these professional development opportunities, there were no teacher-specific professional development plans in place at the school; all teachers are encouraged to attend all professional development sessions. Teachers developed professional goals at the beginning of the year, but teachers' individual goals were not used by leadership to drive instructional support through professional development activities. In its fifth year, Sankofa offers a wide array of professional development opportunities but the content of those opportunities was not based on a professional development plan designed to meet the needs of individual teachers and the school as a whole. Rather, professional development seems to be ad-hoc and subject to the availability of consultants.

Notably, despite the large numbers of teachers new to the school, in the school's fifth year new teachers did not report receiving any special training or guidance, though they reported that the school leadership team was supportive and provided adequate supplies and materials. For example, a teacher who began at Sankofa shortly before the renewal inspection visit reported that two administrators have continually offered to provide help in obtaining resources but there had not been any discussion to date about pedagogical practice since she assumed the position.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<b>Renewal Question 2</b> <b>Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</b>
<b>Benchmark 2A</b> <b>School Specific Non-Academic Goals</b>	<b>2A</b> <b>The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).</b>

The school has no unique measures of non-academic student outcomes contained in its Accountability Plan.

<b>Benchmark 2B</b>  <b>Mission &amp; Design Elements</b>	<b>2B</b> <b>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</b>
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Over the course of the charter, most stakeholders have been aware of and could articulate the mission of Sankofa Charter School:

To “provide educationally underserved middle school students with the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top-quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.”

In the school’s fifth year, the school provided ongoing orientations for new and returning students, and their families, to inform parents of the school’s priorities and inherent mission. Additionally, student interviews conducted at the time of the renewal inspection visit demonstrated the students’ familiarity with the school’s mission. A focus group of 6<sup>th</sup> graders indicated that they all want to go to college and that the school prepares them for college. The entire focus group of 8<sup>th</sup> graders also indicated that they aspire to go to college. And when asked what the goals of the school were, interviewed parents concurred that one of the primary goals is to “get kids ready for college.” In contrast, however, teachers had different understandings of the school’s mission varying from academic goals such as “Make sure kids are successful on state exams” and “Get underprivileged kids into top quality high schools” to affective goals such as to “Educate kids so they can become better citizens” to “Create a disciplined environment for learning.”

Sankofa has not enabled its key design elements to come to fruition. In its original charter application, the founders of KIPP Sankofa Charter School asserted that the school would achieve its mission by: 1) utilizing many of the best teaching practices used in the already-successful KIPP schools across the United States; 2) implementing a rigorous curriculum designed to meet or exceed the New York State Board of Regents performance standards; and 3) upholding KIPP’s Five Pillars of high academic achievement that are the common core principles in all KIPP Schools, which consist of High Expectations, More Time on Task, Focus on Results, Power to Lead, and Choice and Commitment. For reasons aforementioned, over the course of its charter, Sankofa has largely not met the first or second of these key design elements. Regarding the third key design element, as discussed earlier in this report, the school has not been one with high academic expectations nor a focus on results.

<b>Benchmark 2C Governance</b>	<b>2C.1</b>	<b>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.</b>
	<b>2C.2</b>	<b>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</b>

Over the first four years of the charter period, the board of trustees of KIPP Sankofa Charter School did not take the critical steps necessary to improve the academic program nor impose consequences when the school’s leadership failed to act with sufficient urgency.

At the time of the school’s second end-of-year visit, then KIPP Sankofa did not have a functioning board. Membership was inadequate, and the school board had no formal means to evaluate the quality of the school or to assess its progress. Board members were aware of the school’s Accountability Plan but were unable to describe it. While board members had seen student data reports, they did not use them to evaluate the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals. On the occasions when they had reviewed these reports, they relied on the principal to interpret the results for them. In the school’s third year, the board of trustees still lacked a process for evaluating either the director or the overall success of the instructional program. The board continued to rely on the director to tell them how things were progressing in the school. This pattern continued in the school’s fourth year of operation. The school’s board of trustees continued to be in a state of transition relative to membership and leadership, severely curtailing the school board’s ability to provide appropriate support and oversight for the school.

In the school’s fifth year, and at the time of the renewal inspection visit, the board of trustees had made some strides. Specifically, the board expanded to ten members and expects to soon add an eleventh member. The board has worked to ensure that school administrators were not acting as classroom teachers this year. Additionally, the board hired consultants to help govern the school during its transition from a KIPP-governed to a self-governed school, and worked to identify and put into place a new school leader.

However, at the time of the renewal inspection visit, the board continued to relinquish its responsibility for oversight of Sankofa’s academic program. The board as a whole, consisting of many new members, remained generally uninformed and non-participatory in assessing the health of the academic program. Specifically, when asked nine questions on whether the most important academic elements of the Transition Plan were implemented, the board was unable to respond to five of the questions, answered three questions incorrectly and answered just one question correctly. Additionally, this year’s reports from the school leader to the board have focused on many issues: school climate, diversity, enrollment, and recruitment, but generally not the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning.

In the board’s words, it “feels [like] the ship has been righted” in terms of teachers, administrators and parents, however, the board is not basing that conclusion on a firm understanding of the current academic program. Moreover, when asked how they know how well the school is doing, even when pressed to describe how the board monitors the school’s movement forward given the current state of urgency, the board chair cited better record keeping and improved procedures. Further, it has not assumed its oversight responsibility in holding the school leader accountable by engaging in mutual goal-setting.

With the exceptions below, the school's board of trustees has instituted and maintained appropriate organizational policies, systems and processes, and appears to have abided by them. For example the school produced a *Student-Family Handbook 2007-08* that contained the school's mission statement, staff list and many relevant policies.

- There was evidence that some school policies had been updated since the time of the State Education Department's monitoring visit in 2006 (see Benchmark 2E). However, the school's disciplinary policy still contained references to "involuntary transfer" rather than expulsion (with proper due process), such as "[students] may ultimately be asked to transfer back to their home school," which would exceed the authority of a charter school. Additionally, the substantive violations list in the policy included, "any act the CEO or CAO or Dean concludes disrupts the school culture," which appears to be impermissibly vague. In terms of procedure, the policy required parents to come to the school for a conference before a suspended student could return to school. Such practices are not legal inasmuch as it results in long-term suspension without due process. The provision related to alternative instruction was also deficient because it stated, "[f]or a student that has been suspended for more than 5 days, alternative instruction will be provided to the extent required by the law," when it should be provided within 24 hours of any out-of-school suspension of more than one day. In a response to a draft of this report, the school leader indicated that students suspended for more than one day are now offered alternative instruction within 24 hours.
- The absence policy was not entirely clear and contained some problematic provisions. For example, counted among excused absences were "short-term suspensions or other disciplinary actions resulting in absence." If the student attends alternative instruction, the student should not be marked absent. The policy also stated that students could lose credit or be retained "if they are absent for more than 20 days," but did not specify whether it was referring to excused or unexcused absences.
- The special education disciplinary policy does not properly explain the procedural protections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) because the role of the district's committee on special education (CSE), as opposed to just the school, is not incorporated. This creates a false impression for parents because the CSE is mentioned much later only in the policy. Numerical changes to the IDEA regulations were also not included in the policy.
- The dress code policy also suffered from a lack of clarity. No explicit religious exception to the dress code's prohibition on hats or caps was noted even though there were other explicit exceptions to the policy. Also, the policy states, "no student will be admitted to class until his/her attire meets the requirements listed above," but does not state the next step or consequences, which from an compulsory education/due process view should be either instruction in another setting or suspension and alternative instruction.
- The working (as opposed to charter) Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) policy consisted only of a copy of the statute.

Over the term of the school's charter, the school board generally appeared to have abided by the provisions in its by-laws. During much of the charter period, however, the school did not fill vacancies on its board despite direction by the Institute to do so. Moreover, when vacancies were filled, the board often let the new "trustees" vote prior to actual approval as trustees by the Institute per the school's charter.

<b>Benchmark 2D</b>	<b>2D</b>	<b>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</b>
<b>Parents &amp; Students</b>		

In its previous four years, when the school’s partnership with KIPP was in tact, parent and student satisfaction was not high. For example, in the third year inspector school visit, the parents (4) and students (15) who participated in the focus groups with members of the inspection team did not express satisfaction with the school. The students believed that some teachers’ implementation of the school’s behavior management system were punitive. Like the students, the parents who were interviewed were not completely satisfied with their children’s experience.

In the school’s fifth year, relative to previous years, parents and students appeared more satisfied with the school. Though not necessarily a representative sample, interviews with parents and students showed increased levels of satisfaction with the school. In an interview of twelve parents numerous positive proclamations were offered on the improvement of the school from the previous school year including: “The staff cares about whether kids get the education they need ... The current principal is loving, soft spoken and kids respond to her well ... This year’s biggest change is the teachers are responsible and making accommodations they need to make to help your child learn.” The sense of school improvement was also proffered in student focus groups. As one student stated: “Since the school changed from KIPP ... the staff is starting to encourage the kids to think about their future ... I like the school, and other kids like the school, way better than last year.”

However, student enrollment is an important indicator of levels of student, parent and community satisfaction, and Sankofa has never met its student enrollment objectives. More specifically, enrollment levels for each of the five years follow:

- 2003-2004, 84 out of 90 planned students attended (93% of the enrollment objective);
- 2004-2005, 146 out of 180 planned students attended (81% of the enrollment objective);
- 2005-2006, 214 out of 270 (79% of the enrollment objective);
- 2006-2007, 214 out of 250 (86% of the enrollment objective – but if compared with the initial enrollment objective of 360 students the achieved enrollment objective would have been 59%); and in
- 2007-2008, 184 out of 200 (92% of the enrollment objective – it is important to note that the 200 enrollment objective is significantly less than the 250 objective of 2006-2007 despite offering the same number of grade levels).

<b>Benchmark 2E</b> <b>Legal Requirements</b>	<b>2E</b> <b>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</b>
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As part of a compliance review, the Institute reviews its records, including other communications from the State Education Department. Of note in this review were the steps the school took in response to the SED’s *Third Year Monitoring Report* (April 6, 2006) and other SED communications, which outlined instances of non-compliance in the areas of enrollment, teacher certification, employee criminal background checks, special education, student disciplinary action, provision of alternative instruction and facility issues. In the spring of 2006, SED was prepared to place the school on probation for its multiple violations. The Institute interceded on the school’s behalf, compliance improved and probation was avoided. The Institute notes that SED made the following comment in its report related to the school, which also reflects the Institute’s experience in dealing with the school on compliance issues:

The administrative functioning of the School seems to be disorganized. On several previous informal visits by SED personnel, [the principal] was informed about several areas that tend to be problematic for charter schools (e.g. teacher certification and background clearances), and was given suggestions on how to ensure that such problems were minimized or eliminated at KIPP Sankofa. It does not appear from the information provided that the suggestions were taken.

In the later years of the Sankofa’s charter, the school was unable to maintain sufficient enrollment. For example, in April of 2006, the Institute as part of its fiscal monitoring noticed that the school’s enrollment had fallen to 194 students, significantly below its projected enrollment of 270 students. The Institute requested that the school apply to revise its charter to lower enrollment. By the time the school started to do so, it was so late in the school year that the Institute directed the school to submit the request in September 2006 after it had a sense of its enrollment for the 2006-07 school year. The Institute made the following observation in the background to the resultant resolution to amend the charter to reduce enrollment from 360 to 250 students:

Disappointing results from student recruitment efforts, parent initiated student withdrawals, families moving out of the Buffalo area and below average academic performance have contributed to the School’s enrollment drop.

The school also requested and was granted an additional enrollment reduction to 200 students in October 2007 so it would be compliance with its charter.

In its *Third Year Monitoring Report*, SED noted that there was little or no evidence that the school had ever sought the required background clearances for school staff, or made any emergency conditional appointments in violation of violation of Education Law subdivision 2854(3)(a-2). At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school had made substantial progress in this area, but still had six employees and two building substitutes not fully cleared, with one employee having been emergency conditionally appointed but lacking the signed statement on criminal history. As the school board had not delegated the emergency conditional appointment function to an administrator, it has been difficult to update the appointments every 20 business days as required by the Charter Schools Act. Moreover, the board had not put a policy in place for such appointments.

The Institute also followed up on SED’s finding that the school had been in violation of subdivision 2854(3)(a-1) of the Education Law pertaining to the certification of teaching staff. The Institute worked with the former principal on this issue, and at the time of the renewal visit only three teachers were not

certified or pending certification, which was in compliance with state law. However, three and one-half full time equivalent teachers were not highly qualified under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The Institute also reviewed the school's special education program, which SED has stated was not being implemented according to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). At the time of the renewal inspection visit, it appeared that the program was substantially improved and that children with Individualized Education Programs were generally receiving the services specified in their IEPs. The Institute did not find any evidence that the school continued the practice of trying to "involuntarily transfer" (expel) students with disabilities prior to a manifestation hearing, or otherwise improperly discipline them.

The Institute received approximately four written complaints regarding the school over the charter term. The school's admissions policies, student suspensions, leadership and a parent entering the school and confronting a student all were subjects of complaints. In each case, the Institute provided the parent complainants with guidance on filing formal complaints with the school's board. None of the complaints resulted in a formal appeal to the Institute. Separately, the school had stated that it had to terminate an instructor who was involved in a physical altercation with a student.

Lastly, the Institute notes that the school used the name "Sankofa Charter School," rather than its legal name, "KIPP Sankofa Charter School," well prior to the time that name was legally effective as evidenced by even the renewal application.

For most of its charter, the school's board contained at least one attorney. However, that trustee was rarely sought out for advice, nor did the school seek the opinion of outside counsel regarding emergent issues.

With the significant exceptions noted above and under Benchmark 2C.2, the school appeared to be in general and substantial compliance with applicable law, rules and regulations and the terms of its charter at the time of the renewal inspection visit. With the foregoing exceptions, the school appears to have compiled a record of general and substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations during the term of its charter. With the significant exceptions noted, the school generally has maintained effective systems and controls for legal compliance.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<b>Renewal Question 3</b> <b>Is the School Fiscally Sound?</b>
<b>Benchmark 3A</b>  <b>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</b>	<b>3A</b> <b>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.</b>

The school developed a five-year plan as part of its charter application and has subsequently operated pursuant to year-to-year budget plans that have been developed in conjunction with and approved by the school’s board of trustees. The school’s annual budgets have provided a realistic framework for the school’s spending activities and monitoring procedures are in place.

Historically, the annual budget is developed in conjunction with the school director, staff, an outside accountant and the board. For the current year, the budget was developed as part of the transition plan and included input from the board, a consultant and an outside accountant. Budget variances are analyzed routinely and material variances are discussed at the board level. Modifications to the budget are infrequent with the focus on the overall budget rather than on individual line items. A process by which material budget adjustments could be made, as needed, could provide more effective monitoring by the board.

<p><b>Benchmark 3B</b></p> <p><b>Internal Controls</b></p>	<p><b>3B</b></p> <p><b>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.</b></p>
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The school had written fiscal policies and procedures related to internal controls, financial management practices, property management, procurement and cash management. These policies, which were developed for the inception of the school, were updated subsequent to the renewal inspection visit to reflect current operations. Separately, the school had policies requiring signed employee cell phone and computer use agreements.

Over the life of its charter, the school had two significant failures of internal control. The school ultimately did take corrective action after the issues were uncovered. The first example involved the school not having developed appropriate systems to ensure the timely and accurate billing of the school district. As a result, in September 2005, the Institute notified that school that its failure to properly bill the district reflected a lack of fiscal compliance and organizational strength. The school was able to remedy this occurrence so that further action was not required. The next example involved a school employee misusing the school’s credit card in March of 2006. The employee was ultimately fired and the school appropriately notified the Institute about the details of the incident.

Financial oversight by the board has generally been effective. Given the small size of the school’s staff, optimal segregation of duties cannot be achieved. As a result, the continued active financial oversight by the board is required. The board has outsourced the financial back-office operations of the school to an accounting firm, while maintaining appropriate oversight. This arrangement provided a level of independent oversight over the processing of transactions and also allows the school to leverage the experience and competency of staff at the accounting firm. Duties at the accounting firm’s office were appropriately segregated.

Subsequent to the renewal inspection visit, the school ended its relationship with the outside accountant. Currently, the school is seeking to bring a qualified office manager and accounting professional on staff rather than having an outside firm or person provide oversight. The school indicated that often the outside firm was put in the position of reacting to issues and decisions rather than being proactive and having some discretion over spending decisions at the school level. Until the school successfully recruits the right person for the job, it is utilizing an outside consultant with (charter school experience) on a part-time basis who reports directly to the board.

<p><b>Benchmark 3C</b></p> <p><b>Financial Reporting</b></p>	<p><b>3C</b></p> <p><b>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.</b></p>
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Generally, the school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were filed on time during the renewal charter period. Each of the school’s financial statement audit reports have received an unqualified opinion indicating that, the school’s financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school’s financial statements.

The school’s annual audit reports on internal control over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. The board reviews and approves the annual financial statement audit report, although it does not meet separately with the independent auditors, which is considered a best practice and is recommended. The independent auditor did issue a management letter in conjunction with its most recent audit that contained two comments identifying opportunities to strengthen internal controls over credit cards and personnel policies. There were no recurring comments, as previous management letter comments have been addressed by the school.

<b>Benchmark 3D Financial Condition</b>	<b>3D</b>	<b>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).</b>
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The school is in weak financial condition, although it has been generally stable throughout its existence. Recent events have put a strain on the school’s overall position, which otherwise would have been characterized as stable. First, the increase in per-pupil revenue for Buffalo resident students was less than 1 percent this year, compared to an average increase of more than 6 percent in the three previous years. Second, the school’s enrollment has decreased by about 35 students or 15 percent from last year. Third, although some cost savings were realized as part of the restructuring of the school, overall there were additional costs related to those activities. Also, although the school has no long-term debt, it is currently in default on a promissory note payable to KIPP Foundation for \$282,777 that was due March 1, 2007. The school simply does not have the cash flow to repay this amount in a lump sum and hopes therefore to negotiate a payment schedule.

One measure that demonstrates the weak financial condition of the school is the amount of its expendable net assets,<sup>12</sup> which stood at **negative** \$295,837 on June 30, 2007. For FY 2007, the school’s total net assets did increase by \$185,516 and it finished with total net assets of \$532,133. The school has property and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$729,200 that consist of leasehold improvements and equipment.

The school has maintained adequate financial resources, aided by access to a \$175,000 line of credit with a local bank, to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. At June 30, 2007, the balance owed on the credit line was \$75,000. Critical financial needs of the school have not been dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising), in the last two years of operation. Spending per student (total expenses, including grant related, divided by full-time equivalent enrollment) in the last four years was as follows:

2004	2005	2006	2007
\$ 9,491	\$ 10,626	\$ 10,662	\$ 9,247

<sup>12</sup> Unrestricted net assets of \$457,133 subtracted by net property and equipment (\$729,200) and a loan receivable from the Buffalo Board of Education (\$98,770) for transportation, which is not available for current expenses.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<b>Renewal Question 4</b> <b>Should the School’s Charter Be Renewed,</b> <b>What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?</b>
<b>Benchmark 4A</b>  <b>Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)</b>	<b>4A</b> <b>Key structural elements of the school’s plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</b>

During the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, the school’s board of trustees adopted a plethora of changes aimed at improving student performance as noted in its Application for Renewal, “These changes included severing ties between the school and the KIPP Foundation, expanding the board of trustees, hiring a new school leader and charging her with increased accountability for student achievement, school management and performance.” The initiatives have been discussed within the benchmarks of this report, and have not been well implemented during the current school year.

Specifically, the school’s plans include implementing the following:

- a small school environment with a full-time parent/community liaison to build connections between the school and the community;
- a focus on results by benchmarking each student annually and providing academic enrichment and remediation daily;
- order and discipline by devoting time at the beginning of each school year to train the entire school in the consistent application of the discipline policy and behavior code and training teachers in classroom management;
- sound governance by expanding and training the board of trustees in policy and fiscal oversight; and,
- a culture of high expectations to prepare students for future successes.

In light of the information provided in this report over the Sankofa Charter School’s initial charter term, and given the Institute’s recommendation of non-renewal, the school’s plans are not considered reasonable, feasible or achievable.

<p><b>Benchmark 4B</b></p> <p><b>Plans for the Educational Program</b></p>	<p><b>4B</b></p> <p><b>The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</b></p>
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Although the Sankofa Charter School has submitted a draft Accountability Plan that is largely in line with the demands of the Institute’s Accountability Plan guidelines, the school has not come close to meeting the key academic goals in English language arts and mathematics that it set for itself in its Accountability Plan during the initial charter term. Given the Institute’s recommendation of non-renewal, no additional review of plans in this area is warranted at this time.

<p><b>Benchmark 4C</b></p> <p><b>Plans for the Governance Structure</b></p>	<p><b>4C</b>      <b>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</b></p>
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As part of its renewal application, the school provided a governance structure for the term of the next charter that mirrored its present structure. The school also provided legally sufficient by-laws and an acceptable code of ethics. The school board was also following through on and refining its post-KIPP transition plan. Given the Institute’s recommendation of non-renewal, however, further analysis of the governance structure, organizational chart, etc., is not warranted.

<p><b>Benchmark 4D</b> <b>Fiscal &amp; Facility Plans</b></p>	<p><b>4 D</b>      <b>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.</b></p>
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The school’s fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period faces significant challenges regarding enrollment and other areas. However, the school’s fiscal plan makes reasonable assumptions related to expenses with a few exceptions. The school’s spending pattern since its separation from KIPP has not settled into a predictable pattern making it difficult to assess the overall reasonableness of the plan. The school has operated in a fiscally sound manner at higher enrollment levels and might be able to do so in the future if enrollment goals are met. It will likely remain unclear whether the projected plan will be achievable until the conclusion of this year. The school does not rely on variable funding to finance ongoing operations in the plan and it is projecting that adequate cash flow to support operations will be generated, including repaying its debt to the KIPP Foundation. However, given the Institute’s recommendation of non-renewal, further analysis of the fiscal and facility plans is not warranted.

## **APPENDIX**

### **An Overview of Renewal Requirements**

The New York State Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended) (the “Act”) authorizes the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York to grant charters for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools. Charter schools provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independent of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.<sup>1</sup>

In order to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under the Act, the State University Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Among its duties, the Institute is charged with evaluating charter schools’ applications for renewal and providing its resulting findings and recommendations to the State University Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the State University Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).<sup>2</sup>

### **Statutory and Regulatory Considerations**

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. There is no limitation upon the number of times that a charter may be renewed. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application, whether such application be for an initial renewal or any subsequent renewal:

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<sup>1</sup> See § 2850 of the New York Education Law.

<sup>2</sup> The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at [www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org).

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

The Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.<sup>4</sup>

As a charter authorizing entity, the State University Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings ("Required Findings"):

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner;
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act; and,
- (if applicable) in a school district where the total enrollment of resident students attending charter schools in the base year is greater than five percent of the total public school enrollment of the school district in the base year: (i) granting the application would have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the proposed charter school; or (ii) the school district in which the charter school will be located consents to such application.<sup>5</sup>

Where the State University Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.<sup>6</sup> The Regents may approve the proposed charter or return the proposed charter to the State University Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation(s). In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the current charter expires. In the latter case (return to the State University Trustees), the State University Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the State University Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law; as above, it will become operational upon expiration of the current charter.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Education Law § 2851(4).

<sup>4</sup> Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See [www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm).

<sup>5</sup> See Education Law § 2852(2).

<sup>6</sup> See Education Law § 2852(5).

<sup>7</sup> See Education Law §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b).

## **Process for Initial Renewals**

While the Initial Renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University’s accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the “Accountability Plan”)<sup>8</sup> setting forth the goals for the school’s educational program (and other measures if the school desires) in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school’s program, must be consistent with the Institute’s written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the “Accountability Plan Progress Report”).<sup>9</sup> This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school’s progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute’s visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures and to provide feedback to the school on the Institute’s conclusions. Reports and debriefings for the school’s board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school’s progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute identifies potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a school visit to look specifically at the strength of the school’s program and the evidence it is accumulating to support the school’s case for renewal. The number, breadth and scope of visits that the Institute conducts depend primarily on the school’s performance on standardized assessments.

By the start of the last year of a school’s charter (as set forth above), the school must submit an application for charter renewal, setting forth the evidence required by law and the State University Trustees. Applicant charter schools are asked to formulate and report evidence of success in answer to four renewal questions:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school an effective, viable organization?
3. Is the school fiscally sound?
4. What are the school’s plans for the term of the next charter and are they reasonable, feasible and achievable?

The application is reviewed by Institute staff. The staff also conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This audit includes examination of the school’s charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examines audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, the leader of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete. Renewal visit team members conduct a variety of activities to get a sense of the educational program and determine if there are material deficiencies. These activities include: visiting classes, observing lessons, examining student work and other documents, observing school meetings, interviewing staff members and speaking informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's board of trustees and administrators.

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of *Qualitative Education Benchmarks*, often referred to as the "Renewal Benchmarks," that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the Accountability Plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.<sup>10</sup>

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team finalizes the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks are discussed and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark. The team members' completed benchmark comments present a focus for discussion and a summary of the findings. The benchmarks are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support—but do not individually or in limited combination provide—the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation. The Institute then prepares a draft report and provides a copy to the school for its review and comment. The draft contains the findings, discussion and the evidence base for those findings, as well as a preliminary recommendation.

The following renewal outcomes are available to schools that are in their first charter period.<sup>11</sup> Each outcome contains specific criteria that a school must meet in order to be eligible for that outcome. These criteria are keyed to one or more of the Required Findings. In addition to any specific criteria set forth in a particular outcome, a school, to be eligible for any type of renewal, must be able to provide evidence that permits the State University to make *each* of the Required Findings:

- *Early Renewal*: available to a school that after three years of operation has accumulated three years of data in multiple grades on all or nearly all of the standardized assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan and for the last two years has met or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals based on its performance on those measures. In addition, the State University must find that the educational program, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is sound and effective. Early Renewal will be for a full-term of five years only.
- *Short-Term Planning Year Renewal*: available to a school that has taken one or more planning years and has yet to be renewed. The renewal term will be equal in length to the

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.effectiveschools.com>.

<sup>11</sup> A school that is awarded a short-term planning year renewal is still considered a school in its initial charter period when it comes again to renewal in its fifth full year of operation.

number of planning years the school has taken. The State University Trustees must be able to determine that the educational program will be sound during the next charter period based on the available outcomes on the standardized assessment measures and any data available as gathered using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks.

- *Full-Term Renewal*: available to a school in its fifth year, Full-Term Renewal is for the maximum term of five years. In order for a school to be eligible for Full-Term Renewal, a school must at the time of renewal either (a) have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is effective or (b) made strong overall progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is particularly strong and effective.
- *Renewal with Conditions*: available to a school that (a) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term Renewal as regards its educational program, but that has material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that cannot be fully corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to making each and every other required finding, or (b) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term Renewal as regards some portion of its educational program, but requires conditions to improve the academic program. Such conditions may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on the number of students and grades served. Conditions may also be imposed that are consonant with the requirements of NCLB as to schools requiring corrective action. Where appropriate, conditions may be imposed which if not met by the school shall be deemed a substantial and material violation of the school’s charter and therefore expose the school to probation or charter revocation.
- *Short-Term Renewal*: available to a school in its fifth year that (a) has compiled an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement as measured by the school’s progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, but that has in place and in operation at the time of the renewal review an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, that will likely result in the school’s being able to meet or come close to meeting those goals with the additional time that renewal would permit or (b) has compiled an overall record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals but that at the time of the renewal visit, has in place an educational program that, based on its assessment pursuant to the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is inadequate in multiple and material respects. Typically, but not always, Short-Term Renewal will be for two years. Short-Term Renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to educational, organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring Renewal*: available to a school that does not meet the standards for any type of renewal but which submits plans to the State University Trustees for a restructuring of the school that legally commits the school to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including, but not necessarily limited to, a new board of trustees, administrative team, academic program, organizational structure, and such plans, if implemented, would lead to the school likely meeting its standardized

assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan during the next charter period. Whether to permit a school to submit an application for a Restructuring Renewal is at the discretion of the State University.

- *Non-Renewal:* where a school does not present a case for any kind of renewal, the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

Upon receiving a school's comments on the draft report, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and renders its findings and recommendations in their final form. The report is then transmitted to the Committee on Charter Schools of the State University Board of Trustees, the other members of the State University Trustees and the school itself. This report is the product of that process.