



## SUNY Authorized Charter Schools

# Charter Facts

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## Charter Schools and Accountability

**Editor's Note:** Governor Spitzer's strong commitment to accountability in education has prompted much exciting dialogue. The Charter Schools Institute would like to commend that commitment and take this opportunity to highlight the facts regarding charter schools and accountability.

At the most fundamental level, what sets charter schools apart from their traditional district counterparts is an unprecedented level of accountability.

In fact, when one considers the legislatively mandated oversight of each charter school by its own board of trustees, its charter authorizer, and the New York State Board of Regents, and the critical fact that a charter is granted for a period of five years only—and that authorizers have the option to not renew, i.e., close a charter school for failing to meet rigorous academic outcomes, legal and fiscal requirements, it becomes clear that accountability is more than a goal for charter schools, it is a non-negotiable requirement.

By way of background, the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts; schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all

students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure. Charter schools are public schools in every respect, they are open to all children, and non-sectarian in their programs.

Notably, the drafters of the Act took deliberate steps to assure that the longevity of charter schools was inextricably tied to achievement and accountability.

Charter schools are given the freedom to develop their own curriculum, choose staff, set the length of the school day and year, and establish their own standards for student behavior. However, in exchange for these freedoms, a charter school must show within its five-year charter period that it has raised student achievement.

All charter schools are required to establish specific student achievement goals and the measures that define what constitutes meeting those goals. Note that the SUNY Board of Trustees has formalized this process by requiring that all SUNY authorized charter schools submit designated Accountability Plans—similar to the Governor's proposed Contract for Excellence—which become part of the school's charter. SUNY has further set strong standards with

- Please see ACCOUNTABILITY, page 2

### The State University of New York and Charter Schools

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 granted the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York the power to authorize 50 charters, for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools offering instruction in grades K-12. The Charter Schools Institute was created by the Board of Trustees in February 1999 to assist it in carrying out its responsibilities under the Act. Guided by the rigorous standards set by the Board of Trustees, the Institute's oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools is comprehensive, including: evaluating initial applications for the opening of charter schools; providing technical assistance and guidance to schools where necessary; requiring schools to take remedial action or placing schools on probation; conducting a comprehensive evaluation when a school applies to renew its charter; and reporting to the school and the public on each school's performance and progress.

## ACCOUNTABILITY, continued from page 1

respect to performance on State assessments (see text box lower-right).

Charter schools must meet stated student performance goals, as well as standards regarding fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness, within the charter period.

Charter school students must take all the same state tests as district students and charter schools have to meet the state's performance requirements relating to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees which is directly accountable for school performance. That board, while independent, is subject to comprehensive public oversight by the school's authorizer and the Board of Regents. Like district school boards, charter school boards of trustees must adhere to New York State's Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws.

Charter schools are held strictly accountable for the state and federal funds they receive, are audited annually by a certified public accountant, and subject to audit by the Office of the New York State Comptroller. Charter schools must comply with laws regarding health, safety, civil rights and special education, as well as the provisions of the Charter Schools Act. If a charter school does not live up to its high

expectations, the school's authorizer—or the New York State Board of Regents—can find the school in violation of its charter or educational law and actually not renew its charter, i.e., close it down.

And in what is truly an unprecedented level of accountability, charter schools must apply for renewal at the conclusion of every charter period. Unlike their district counterparts, charter schools must continually prove that they have earned the privilege of educating New York's children or risk non-renewal (i.e., closure).

### SUNY ACCOUNTABILITY

**SUNY has set particularly strong standards for the charter schools it authorizes including that at least 75% of students who have been enrolled for two or more years score at or above proficiency on New York State assessments, and that the school outperforms the local school district and similar public schools state-wide.**

**Over the course of its first five years, the SUNY Charter Schools Institute has made the difficult recommendation of non-renewal five times. And true to its commitment to accountability and the highest possible standards, the SUNY Board of Trustees has supported those recommendations.**

## Ongoing Oversight of SUNY Authorized Charter Schools: The School Visit Process

In addition to monitoring a school's compliance with its charter and the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. The Board has adopted a set of practices and policies, including a system for ongoing oversight and evaluation, that strives to balance respect for school autonomy with the need to hold schools strictly accountable for student results.

A central component of SUNY's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of school inspection visits by Institute staff. Generally conducted toward the conclusion of the first and second years of instruction during an initial charter cycle and regularly thereafter,

formal school visits (supplemented by more frequent informal visits and communication) are generally performed by two- to four-member inspection teams comprised of Institute academic program staff and, where necessary, outside experts.

Importantly, Institute academic program staff are skilled and dedicated educators with years of prior experience as teachers and administrators in traditional public schools and districts, charter schools and the New York State Education Department. Further adding rigor to the program is the Institute's practice, at the conclusion of the third year of a five-year charter cycle,

- Please see VISIT, page 4

## SUNY Authorized Charter Schools: Grades Offered, Enrollment

| City/Area        | School  | Grades Offered 2006-07 | Enrollment as of 10-11-06 | Grades to be Offered 2007-08 | Planned Grades (for charter term) |
|------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Albany</b>    | Achievement Academy Charter School              | 5-6                    | 145                       | 5-7                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | Albany Community Charter School                 | K-1                    | 104                       | K-2                          | K-4                               |
|                  | Albany Preparatory Charter School               | 5-6                    | 111                       | 5-7                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | KIPP Tech Valley Charter School                 | 5-6                    | 162                       | 5-7                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | New Covenant Charter School                     | K-6                    | 701                       | K-6                          | K-6                               |
| <b>Bronx</b>     | Bronx Charter School for Better Learning        | 1-4                    | 229                       | 1-5                          | 1-5                               |
|                  | Bronx Charter School for Excellence             | K-3                    | 200                       | K-4                          | K-4                               |
|                  | Bronx Preparatory Charter School                | 5-12                   | 521                       | 5-12                         | 5-12                              |
|                  | Carl C. Icahn Charter School                    | K-7                    | 280                       | K-8                          | K-7                               |
|                  | Family Life Academy Charter School              | K-5                    | 286                       | K-5                          | K-5                               |
|                  | Grand Concourse Academy Charter School          | K-4                    | 285                       | K-4                          | K-4                               |
| <b>Brooklyn</b>  | Achievement First-Bushwick Charter School       | K-1                    | 163                       | K-2, 5                       | K-8                               |
|                  | Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School               | K-7                    | 648                       | K-8                          | K-8                               |
|                  | Community Partnership Charter School            | K-5                    | 288                       | K-5                          | K-5                               |
|                  | Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant | K-3                    | 177                       | K-4                          | K-5                               |
|                  | Leadership Preparatory Charter School           | K-1                    | 116                       | K-2                          | K-4                               |
|                  | UFT Charter School                              | K-2, 6                 | 355                       | K-3, 6-7                     | K-9                               |
| <b>Buffalo</b>   | Buffalo United Charter School                   | K-7                    | 484                       | K-7                          | K-7                               |
|                  | King Center Charter School                      | K-4                    | 104                       | K-4                          | K-4                               |
|                  | KIPP Sankofa Charter School                     | 5-8                    | 250                       | 5-8                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | Oracle Charter School                           | 7-10                   | 243                       | 7-11                         | 7-12                              |
|                  | South Buffalo Charter School                    | K-8                    | 641                       | K-8                          | K-8                               |
|                  | Tapestry Charter School                         | K-9                    | 269                       | K-10                         | K-12                              |
| <b>Manhattan</b> | Amber Charter School                            | K-6                    | 364                       | K-6                          | K-6                               |
|                  | Girls Preparatory Charter School                | K-2                    | 139                       | K-3                          | K-4                               |
|                  | Harbor Science and Arts Charter School          | 1-8                    | 210                       | 1-8                          | 1-8                               |
|                  | Harlem Day Charter School                       | K-5                    | 263                       | K-5                          | K-5                               |
|                  | Harlem Link Academy Charter School              | K-2                    | 162                       | K-3                          | K-4                               |
|                  | Harlem Village Academy Charter School           | 5-8                    | 199                       | 5-8                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | KIPP S.T.A.R. College Prep Charter School       | 5-8                    | 332                       | 5-8                          | 5-8                               |
|                  | Leadership Village Academy Charter School       | 5-6                    | 114                       | 5-6                          | 5-6                               |
|                  | Sisulu-Walker Charter School                    | K-3                    | 241                       | 1-4                          | K-5                               |
| <b>Queens</b>    | Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School  | K-5                    | 461                       | K-5                          | K-5                               |
|                  | Our World Neighborhood Charter School           | K-8                    | 670                       | K-8                          | K-8                               |
| <b>Rochester</b> | Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School          | K-6                    | 290                       | K-6                          | K-6                               |
|                  | True North Rochester Prep. Charter School       | 5                      | 80                        | 5-6                          | 5-8                               |
| <b>Roosevelt</b> | Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School     | K-8                    | 502                       | K-8                          | K-8                               |
| <b>Rotterdam</b> | International Charter School of Schenectady     | K-8                    | 693                       | K-8                          | K-8                               |
| <b>Troy</b>      | Ark Community Charter School                    | K-6                    | 179                       | K-6                          | K-6                               |
| <b>Wainscott</b> | Child Development Center of the Hamptons        | K-8                    | 65                        | K-8                          | K-8                               |

To open in 2007/2008 (City, Grades Offered at Full Implementation of Charter):

Bedford Stuyvesant Collegiate C.S. (New York, 5-8); Carl C. Icahn C.S. Bronx North (New York, K-5); Family Academy C.S. of NY (New York, K-6); Green Tech Charter High (Albany, 9-12); and Henry Johnson C.S. (Albany, K-3)

VISIT, continued from page 2

to seek an independent evaluation of the school by an Institute-designated external inspection team.

Visit team members utilize the school's Accountability Plan and the Institute's Charter Renewal Benchmarks as the lens through which they examine the school (we encourage readers to learn more about the Institute's ongoing oversight and evaluation processes, the SUNY renewal process, and Renewal Benchmarks online at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm)).

In all cases, visit teams seek evidence of the effectiveness of a school's education program based on the academic renewal benchmarks related to: curriculum, instruction and assessment; professional development; environment and discipline; and fidelity to the school's charter, including its mission. The visits include interviews with the school leader, classroom observations, reviews of student work, and interviews

with staff, parents, students and school board members. The compilation of this evidence is used to formulate a comprehensive written report for schools.

It is important to note that the State University Trustees have instructed Institute staff to be very candid in conveying their insights and observations to the schools so that these documents serve as effective resources for schools as they move toward renewal.

Visit reports also serve as vital communication tools in informing current and prospective school parents and the community-at-large about each charter school's progress.

School visit reports, and related renewal reports, are posted on the Institute's website at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReports.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReports.htm), and widely distributed by schools.

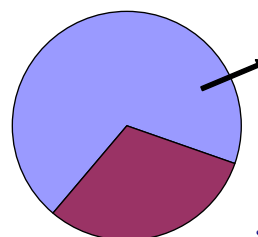
## About SUNY Authorized Charter Schools

- 40 SUNY authorized charter schools are currently serving nearly 12,000 students.
- Of those 40 schools, 34 (85%) have waiting lists for admission totaling more than 8,000 additional students.
- Five additional SUNY authorized charter schools will open in either fall 2007 or fall 2008.
- As noted previously, five schools have not been renewed, i.e., closed, for failing to meet the goals outlined in their Accountability Plans, the requirements of the New York Charter Schools Act or the rigorous standards of the State University Trustees.
- An Institute analysis of current data (the State Education Department has released test results for three SUNY authorized charter schools not included in its initial report of test results) finds that fully 69% of SUNY authorized charter schools—open for at least one year at the time of the exam—outperformed their local districts on State exams in both mathematics and English language arts. Note that Institute analyses

conservatively disregard results for five SUNY schools that opened in Sept. 2005 (thus open for less than one year at the time of the test administrations), as these results, positive or negative, likely reflect the skill level of incoming students rather than the effectiveness of the school.

Detailed performance data on SUNY authorized charter schools is available on the Institute's website at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/parentPerformance.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/parentPerformance.htm).

### Results: SUNY Authorized Charter Schools



**69% of SUNY Authorized Charter Schools Outperformed their Local District on the NYS Mathematics and ELA exams**

■ Outperformed the local district  
■ Underperformed the local district

Source: Institute analysis of 2005-06 SED test data

**Visit [www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org) today!**

The Institute's website has been updated to include detailed school profiles on every charter school in New York State. Also available online, the Institute's new informational video:

*Choice, Accountability, Excellence: SUNY Authorized Charter Schools.*