



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE
AS TO THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER
RENEWAL OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL OF
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

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INTRODUCTION

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 (the “Act”) authorizes the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “Board of Trustees”) 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 independently 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.¹

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

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the Board of Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, the merits of a school’s case for renewal. It has been created and issued pursuant to the “Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewals of Charters for State University Authorized Charter Schools” (the “State University Renewal Practices”).² More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

¹ See § 2850 of the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

²The State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (revised January 25, 2005) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application:

- 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.³

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

As a charter authorizing entity, the Board of Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following 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; and
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.⁵

Where the Board of 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.⁶ The Regents may approve or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation. In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the initial charter expires. In the latter case (return to the Board of Trustees), the Board of 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 Board of 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.⁷

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

⁴ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/howto/renewal.html>.

⁵ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁶ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

⁷ See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

Process for Renewal

While that 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")⁸ setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually 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").⁹ 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. Reports and de-briefings 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 provides general advice as to 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 comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

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

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

⁸ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/reports.html> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/Model%20Progress%20Report1.pdf> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

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 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, a lead member 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 (professional development plans, special education plans, school newsletters, *etc.*). Renewal visit team members visit classes, observe lessons, examine student work, sit in on school meetings, interview staff members and speak 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 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.¹⁰

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 completed benchmarks 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, but does not contain a recommendation. Upon receiving a school's comments, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and determines its findings in their final form. The report is then finalized, recommendations are included, and copies are provided to the members of the Committee on Charter Schools, the other members of the Board of Trustees and the schools themselves. This report is the product of that process.

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

READER'S GUIDE

This renewal report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Recommendations and Executive Summary, Findings and Discussion and completed Renewal Benchmarks. As this guide, the Introduction, and School Description speak for themselves, no guidance is provided for these sections. Guidance as to the remaining sections is set forth below.

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Institute's Recommendations are the end result of its review process. In this section, the Institute provides not only its recommendation as to whether the charter should be renewed, but the recommended terms of any renewal, *i.e.*, short or long-term, grades and number of students it is recommended the school be authorized to serve, conditions under which the charter is renewed, *etc.* Following the recommendations themselves is a short executive summary that lays out in abbreviated form reasons for the recommendation as well as the findings that support the recommendation.

Pursuant to the State University Renewal Practices, the recommendations made by the Institute can take the following forms.

- *Early renewal*: available to schools in the fourth year of the charter that can at that point make a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal. Schools that gain early renewal will then have five full years of instruction before facing renewal again, thus allowing them to concentrate on instruction and providing them with more ready access to capital markets.
- *Short-term planning year renewal*: available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools will be able with limited review to obtain renewal in order to allow them to gather at least four full years of data before facing a full-blown renewal review.
- *Renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year. Schools that have a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal will be eligible for renewal term of five years.
- *Renewal with conditions*: available to schools that 1) have a compelling and unambiguous educational record of success but that have material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that practically cannot be completely corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to a determination that the school is fiscally, legally and organizationally sound, or 2) have demonstrated sufficient academic performance for renewal, but require conditions to improve the academic program. Such

conditions may include but are not limited to restrictions on the number of students and grades served.

- *Short-term renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year that present an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement, but that have effectively implemented measures to correct those deficiencies and such measures are likely to lead to educational success and students' academic improvement with additional time. Typically, but not always, short-term renewal will be for two years. A short-term renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring renewal*: available to schools that have not presented a case for renewal of any kind, but that are voluntarily willing to enter into a restructuring plan whereby the current school would cease instruction at the end of the school's final year of instruction under the current charter and its Board of Trustees would wind up operations of the school. Thereafter, the school's Board would legally commit itself to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including a new Board of Trustees, administrative team, academic program, enrollment and organizational structure, and potentially a new location, which school then could meet and exceed state standards and all the requirements of the Act. Once restructured the education corporation would have authority to recommence instruction.
- *Non-renewal*: where a school does not present a case for renewal (short term, conditional, or otherwise), the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

In addition to discussing the recommendations themselves (and any conditions made part of those recommendations), the executive summary also contains the findings required by subdivision 2852(2) of the Education Law, including whether the school, if renewed, is likely to improve student learning and achievement.

2. Finding and Discussion

The findings are grouped and separated into four sections corresponding to the four questions that a charter school seeking renewal must answer and must provide evidence supporting its answer. They are:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

Below each group of findings is a summary of the evidence supporting the finding. This evidence is a synthesis of information gathered over the life of the school's charter and is analyzed through the lens of the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks (available on the Institute's website).

The ordering of the findings—with those regarding a school's academic performance and outcomes placed first—reflect the fact that renewal of a State University authorized charter is primarily based on a school's progress towards performance-based goals that the charter school and the Institute agreed to in the school's Accountability Plan. However, while success in meeting these goals is the primary determining factor, the school's ability to demonstrate that its educational program as implemented is effective and that the organization is viable, fiscally stable and in compliance with applicable law are also important factors. So, too, the school must be able to show that its plans for the charter renewal term are feasible, reasonable and most of all achievable.

3. Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmark section contains each renewal benchmark together with a review of the pertinent evidence gathered during the renewal cycle. As noted earlier, the benchmarks, similar to the findings, are grouped under the four renewal questions.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Charter School of Science and Technology (CSST) was approved by the State University Board of Trustees in January 2000 and by the Board of Regents in May of that year. It opened in the fall of 2000. The school is located in a five-story renovated research building just north of downtown Rochester at 690 Saint Paul Street, Rochester, New York. The structure of the school follows a standard Edison design with teachers and students grouped into multi-grade Houses (except for House 6, which includes only sixth grade), and each two Houses further organized into Academies by grade level. The school currently enrolls 1109 students in grades Kindergarten through eight.

The school's mission is as follows:

The mission of the Charter School of Science & Technology is to provide a world class education that will enable all students to eventually reach or surpass appropriate levels of proficiency as defined by the NY State English/Language Arts and Math Tests and other appropriate assessments. CSST will provide a rich and challenging curriculum for all students; a professional environment for teachers; more effective use of time; technology for an information age; and a multi-varied assessment process that promotes accountability to the school's parents and community.

The school is currently under new leadership at the Board level and with its fifth new Principal. The school has contracted for management services with Edison Schools, Incorporated, which has implemented its school design in 136 public schools, including many charter schools, with more than 75,000 students. The school's academic program, based on the Edison model, employs a comprehensive curriculum that includes Direct Instruction, project-based and cooperative learning. The Edison model organizes students and teachers into three academies: Primary Academy (Kindergarten through second grades), Elementary Academy (third through fifth), and Junior Academy (sixth through eighth). At CSST, the Principal oversees the Directors of the Primary (Kindergarten through third grades); Elementary (fourth through sixth); and Junior (seventh and eighth grades) Academies. The Primary Academy consists of multi-grade houses, whereas the Elementary and Junior Academy houses are organized by grade.

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation: The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees not approve the application for charter renewal submitted by the Charter School of Science and Technology and that the educational program of the Charter School of Science and Technology *i.e.*, the school, not be renewed and close at the end of the present school year. As the Charter School of Science and Technology charter expires during the course of the current school year, the Institute further recommends that the charter be renewed through and including December 31, 2005, which will allow the school's Board of Trustees to provide instruction under the terms and conditions of the original charter through the end of the current school year, terminate the education program at the end of the 2004-05 school year and wind up the affairs of the school in an orderly fashion. 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 current school year.¹¹

Summary Discussion

The Charter School of Science and Technology (CSST) is located in Rochester, New York and partnered with Edison Schools, Incorporated, a for-profit educational service provider. The school provides instruction in grades Kindergarten through eight with a current total enrollment of approximately 1109 students. The school has applied for a five-year-term renewal charter.

In order for a charter school to qualify for even a short-term renewal, the school must be able to present student assessment data that, at the very least, presents a mixed record of academic success. In addition, the school at the time of renewal must have in place the personnel, programs and structures, such that, if the school's charter were renewed, the school would be likely in that time to produce improvements in student achievement and meet its Accountability Plan measures and goals, or at the very least make significant and consistent progress towards them. Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, the Institute has not made and can not make that finding.

As set forth in detail in the findings and benchmarks, over the first four years of the charter, the Charter School of Science and Technology (CSST) has made limited progress toward meeting the key academic outcomes in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics it set for itself.

¹¹ Pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised January 25, 2005 and available on the Institute's website www.newyorkcharters.org), the school's Board of Trustees may seek a restructuring of the charter before December 31, 2005, to allow the continued corporate existence of the education corporation and possible re-use of the charter by future applicants.

The only positive trend the school has had was in the third year, in which scores on the state assessments improved from the very low scores posted in the second year, and ELA scores were higher than the 2000-01 baseline (first year) scores. However, as CSST's ELA and math results were initially low, and the ELA results declined sharply in the fourth year, the school remains far from achieving the desired level of performance. Over the four years of the charter, the school has generally performed substantially below its comparison schools in the Rochester City School District on the fourth grade state examinations and about the same or marginally better than those schools on the eighth grade exams. In addition to the school's very low performance on the state assessments, it also showed minimal "value-added" growth on the Stanford 9 and Terra Nova tests. Since reading results on both tests have generally declined from year to year, the school is not able to show that it has added value to student learning. As such, and with very minor exception, the student achievement record is negative; at best, it might be characterized as ambiguous and inconsistent. Certainly, the student assessment results alone provide no basis on which to provide the school more time to reach its student achievement goals.

In regards to the qualitative indicators of the educational program's effectiveness in the school's fifth year, the Institute's renewal inspection team did not find that the program and personnel in place were of sufficient strength to make it likely that the school, if given more time, would make substantial, meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan goals. As the findings and evidence throughout the report indicate, while the inspection team found improvements in almost every aspect of the program, it was, at the time of the renewal visit, materially deficient in several critical respects.

In particular, the new Principal, with the strong support of the Board and the school's management company, Edison, has made improvements in student behavior and the school's assessment practices. Indeed, the Board's contributions in this regard are notable and the dedication of the individuals who make up the Board (which was reconstituted at the end of the fourth year) highly commendable. However, those improvements have not been sufficient to have transformed the school's program into one characterized by consistent rigor—a prerequisite if the school were to be likely to make the kind of consistent and meaningful progress that the State University expects and requires under its renewal procedures. Thus, while students were well-behaved in the hallways and public spaces (in contrast with the school's early years) and classroom behavior was improved, chronic, low-level interruptions and disruptions in a large number of classrooms persist, preventing teachers from capitalizing on instructional time.

As with student behavior, there has also been an increase in the focus on academic achievement and the implementation of an internal assessment system to drive instruction (again driven by the Principal, but with the assistance and cooperation of the Board of Trustees and Edison). However, the various components of a successful system are not integrated, and only the first component, collecting student data, is well-developed. Still largely undeveloped are the systems and, more importantly, the high-quality personnel that are needed to provide guidance and coaching to teachers on how to use the data to become better teachers.

Directly linked to this shortage is the rigor and proficiency of instruction at the school. As with other aspects of the school, there have been improvements in this regard, and there are a number of exemplary teachers at work in the school. Moreover, the Principal, again with the support of

the school's Board of Trustees and Edison, has instituted a working teacher evaluation system, which has resulted in an increased focus on instructional skills building, proficiency and results—and the decision to make numerous changes in personnel.

Nonetheless, these improvements and the pockets of excellence that do exist in the larger organization (partly as a result of the Principal's efforts and partly as a result of a core, but still small, group of quality teachers having been gathered over the previous years) have not reached a critical mass. Despite a number of teachers leaving at the end of the fourth year and the Principal having been willing to replace a number of weaker teachers and place a number of others on improvement plans, there remain a great many teachers in need of intensive professional development, including, most importantly, day-to-day coaching and guidance from a cadre of experienced and high-quality teachers.

At the time of the renewal visit, however, it was precisely that group of highly qualified lead teachers that was, in the main, missing. The inspection team found instead that many lead teachers, while perhaps having experience as teachers, were not skilled as teachers or as coaches to teachers. So, too, the Academy Directors (who are responsible for groups of grades), were uneven in the level of skill they brought to their supervisory roles, due, in part, to very limited experience. As such, the sheer number of teachers requiring intensive training had overwhelmed the professional development capabilities of the organization, making the very sincere efforts at professional development, and the number of new supports from Edison, inadequate to the task. In sum, the school at the time of the renewal visit had not developed, and in the Institute's opinion was not on its way to developing, an infrastructure of experienced and highly qualified lead teachers and administrative support personnel to translate the Principal's academic focus and initiatives regarding rigorous classroom instruction to the great majority of classrooms.

Overall, then, the Institute finds that the personnel, programs and structures in place, in quantity or quality, while certainly an improvement over those in place in the first four years of the charter, are not sufficient to make it likely that the school would meet its Accountability Plan goals—or make significant and consistent progress towards them—if the school's charter were renewed.

Accordingly, for these reasons, and based on the other findings and evidence set forth in more detail in this renewal report, the Institute recommends that the school not be granted a short- or full-term renewal. Rather, the Institute recommends that the school program that the Charter School of Science and Technology is currently operating be terminated at the end of the 2004-05 school year and that renewal be granted for the purpose of completing current instruction and allowing the corporation to wind up its affairs in an orderly manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

- Finding 1: The Charter School of Science and Technology (CSST) has met almost none of the key academic outcomes in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics it set for itself. Over the four years of the charter, the school has made limited progress toward its goals. As CSST's ELA and math results were initially low, the school remains far from achieving the desired level of performance.*
- Finding 2: The level of instruction is mixed with notable strength in the Elementary Academy but equally notable weakness in the Primary and Junior Academies. Many of the school's teachers are still learning their craft. While the school has made an effort to increase its capacity to improve the faculty's skill and proficiency, the number of teachers requiring this concentrated training and development presents a profound organizational challenge for CSST.*
- Finding 3: In the fifth year, the curriculum is complete. It is operationalized through regular, focused grade-level team meetings.*
- Finding 4: A consistent culture of high expectations has not yet been established. In a significant number of instances, there is evidence of low standards: student work is graded as proficient that is not, and too many teachers acquiesce to students opting out of learning as long as they are not disruptive. There are notable and emphatic exceptions to this pattern.*
- Finding 5: Under the new administration, the school has made the use of data a priority and has more fully implemented the existing assessment tools to allow teachers to use data to drive instruction. Now, in its fifth year, it has introduced additional instruments to begin building an organization that provides teachers with ongoing feedback on individual student learning; the effectiveness of these new systems and their use is at present uneven.*
- Finding 6: Student behavior has improved significantly from the unstructured, disorderly, and occasionally dangerous environment of the first four years. This is particularly notable in the public spaces, for instance, the cafeteria, hallways and buses. Student behavior is generally appropriate. However, classroom management is uneven and chronic but low-level misbehavior still interferes with instruction in many classrooms.*
- Finding 7: The school has re-designed its professional development program to emphasize the importance of instructional practice in accelerating student achievement. It has also made, in the fifth year, a consistent effort to*

identify those teachers in need of improvement. However, the scope and scale of this project is so large, given the number and needs of the teaching staff, that it outstrips the resources that are now available, even with an administration, Board of Trustees and management company that are strongly committed to it.

Finding 8: Early evidence indicates that the Board has hired a Principal who has so far established a program that holds teachers accountable and gives them an investment in the school. As she has been in place for only a few months, the school has not yet institutionalized this new vision and it would be unlikely to persist without her.

The Charter School of Science and Technology (CSST) has met almost none of the key academic outcomes in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics it set for itself. Over the four years of the charter, the school has made limited progress toward its goals. The only positive trend the school has had was in the third year, in which scores on the state assessments improved from the very low scores posted in the second year, and fourth grade ELA scores were higher than the 2000-01 baseline scores (first year). As CSST's ELA and math results were initially low, and declined sharply in the fourth year, however, the school remains far from achieving the desired level of performance.

Over the four years of the charter, the school has generally performed substantially below its comparison schools in the Rochester City School District on the fourth grade state examinations and about the same or slightly better than those schools on the eighth grade exams. For example, in the school's fourth year, less than one of five fourth graders was at or above the proficient level in ELA, whereas in the district, double that proportion reached proficiency. In math, two of five fourth graders were proficient, while the district managed to bring three of five students to proficient levels. In the eighth grade, both the district and the school had proficiency levels below 20 percent.

The school's very low performance on the state assessments (and in comparison with the Rochester City School District) is not counterbalanced by a strong showing of "value-added" growth. Based on students' performance on the Stanford 9 and Terra Nova tests, the school has been adding little, if any, value to student learning. Reading results on both tests have generally declined from year-to-year. At the end of the fourth year, CSST students were scoring on average below the 35th percentile in both reading and math on tests in which the 50th percentile is the equivalent of grade-level nationally.¹² The lack of value-added growth

¹² While there is no comprehensive study that correlates performance on the Terra Nova or Stanford 9 with performance on the state assessments, the data the Institute has reviewed suggests that students, on average, must be

is also evident in the relatively small differences between the percentage of students at proficiency on the State assessments who had been at the school for at least two years and those students who had not.

Overall, the results indicate that most CSST students are *not* being prepared for high school by virtue of the small proportion of them who are scoring proficient on the fourth and eighth grade state examinations. The value-added data, as noted above, confirm the instructional program has not enabled students to make progress toward achieving a desired level of performance.

Turning from student assessment outcomes to the qualitative indicators that the Institute uses to assess the current state of the school's educational program, it is clear that in general, there has been substantial and distinct improvement over the life of the charter in some areas (with particular improvement in the fifth year). However, significant structural weaknesses remain.

In the school's fifth year, the school is under the leadership of the school's fifth Principal. During the Institute's renewal visit in December 2004, it was clear that the Principal had established a new school culture, both in terms of student behavior and focus on accountability at all levels, including internal assessment systems (particularly use of the Edison Benchmarks) and teacher evaluation.

In regards to student behavior, the renewal team found students to be well-behaved in the hallways and public spaces. The aura of menace that had characterized the school in the first two years of the charter (and to a lesser extent thereafter) has been eliminated and the school felt safe, a feeling echoed by teachers, administrators and parents. Still, even though this significant change had been effected, and classroom behavior was improved, in many classrooms, chronic, low-level interruptions and disruptions prevented teachers from capitalizing fully on the instructional time available to them. Moreover, even where disruptions had been minimized, there appeared to be, in at least the Junior Academy, an implicit arrangement between students and teacher: if the students did not become disorderly, the teacher would ignore their opting out of the lesson and chattering amongst themselves.

As with student behavior, there has also been an increase in the focus on academic achievement and the implementation of an internal assessment system to drive instruction. In its fifth year, CSST has set a priority of using student assessment data for its instructional program and has laid the groundwork for using a rich array of instruments. However, the various

well above the 50th percentile in order to have a high probability of testing as proficient on the state assessments. This is especially true in the eighth grade.

components of a successful system—gathering assessment data, analyzing it, using such data to improve instruction, using such data to adjust the instructional program—are not integrated, and only the first component, collecting student data (primarily using the Edison Benchmark system), is well-developed.

As such, while data is gathered on a regular basis, a significant number of the teachers do not know how to use that data to drive instruction, *e.g.*, how to change their lesson plans, their focus or their pedagogy in order to improve student understanding of the subjects and areas for which the assessments show students are not prepared. Moreover, there is no systematic basis under which student work (other than standardized assessments such as the Benchmarks) is evaluated and correlated to the learning and performance standards that children must master. Indeed, far too much student work is graded as proficient that is clearly not. As indicated, below, the school does not have at present the systems and personnel to quickly and effectively correct these deficiencies.

More generally, in regards to the rigor and proficiency of the instruction that the school offers, it has improved from the school's opening years. Clearly, there are a number of exemplary teachers at work in the school. This is particularly true in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades where the teachers appeared to have a strong sense of direction and focus on appropriate academic content and methods. In significant part (the majority), however, the staff continues to be characterized by weakness in instructional proficiency and classroom management skills. While the school, in its response to a draft of this report, indicates that the Principal, since arriving last summer, has removed more than 20 teachers based on her assessment of their capacity to deliver the instructional program and promote student success, there are a great many novice teachers whose development needs are significant. However, teachers with the most experience are often not strong role models on how to provide rigorous instruction. Not, surprisingly, therefore, the sense of urgency in regards to student achievement that the Principal has made her focus has not translated downwards to many classrooms—and even where there is a will, there is not much knowledge how to implement that focus.

To address these significant weaknesses in the rigor and consistency of the instruction that the school offers, the school has made professional development a priority. However, the professional development program at the time of the renewal visit is inadequate to address the scale of the school's needs. The school faces serious challenges in developing its staff due to the skill limitations and/or inexperience of many lead teachers and the Academy Directors as instructional leaders, the number of teachers needing support, and the focus of training during the summer before many teachers are hired, as well as the sheer size of the school. As a result,

despite the Principal's new emphasis on evaluation of each teacher on a regular basis (which system is in place), there are insufficient supports and personnel to drive improvement based on these evaluations. This is true to a far lesser extent in the Elementary Academy.

In sum, the school does not have the infrastructure for developing a cadre of experienced and highly qualified lead teachers and administrative support personnel to translate the Principal's focus and initiatives to the great majority of classrooms. For this reason, primarily, the Institute found that the present Principal is quite critical to the continued success of the school—and concomitantly, if she were to leave, the Board would be faced with the challenge of finding a strong instructional leader to replace her, a daunting task, especially in a short period of time. Moreover, even if the Principal remains, she is not able to be in all the places at all the times that would be necessary to affect the ambitious plans she, the Board and the management company have for improving the school.

2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Finding 1: The school's promise to provide a high-quality science and technology program has not been fulfilled.

Finding 2 While the school generally met its Accountability Plan goal for parental satisfaction as measured by parental surveys, persistence rates over the life of the charter have been low. In the fourth year, parental dissatisfaction with the direction of the school was a critical factor in the Board being reorganized.

Finding 3: In the first four years, the Board largely failed to carry out effectively its responsibilities. In the fifth year the Board was reorganized and has an appropriate understanding of its role. However, the school leader and the management company have not yet established all the systems necessary to determine and oversee the effectiveness of the program.

Finding 4: The school is generally in substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, and the provisions in its charter.

In the first four years of the charter, and, in particular, from 2002 to early 2004, the Board of Trustees experienced fairly rapid turnover. In addition to turnover at the Board level, the Board hired and fired four Principals from 2000 through 2004. During that time, it appears that the Board did not utilize criteria for the hiring or dismissal of the School Principal. Moreover, the Board acknowledged that it did not provide for adequate time to plan and conduct a search in order to maximize the possibility of retaining a highly-qualified school leader after terminating the previous leader. The school's fourth Principal left the position in spring 2004; as a

result the school was without a Principal during a significant part of the fourth year, and instructional leadership defaulted to three Academy Directors during this period.

The Board was reorganized in the spring/summer of 2004, after recognition that the school had made little if any significant progress in meeting its academic accountability goals, and after complaints from parents. Only one member who had served on the Board previous to the reorganization, a member who was instrumental in effecting that change, now serves on the Board.

In the few months that the reorganized Board has been in place, it has taken the following actions: put in place a timely system for the selection of a school leader; reshaped the mission statement of the school (as now constituted, the school's mission to improve student learning and achievement is clear); emphasized the importance of student achievement in the core academic subjects and shifted resources from other areas to support that emphasis; and placed greater emphasis on retention of Board members.

At the time of the renewal visit, however, the Board had yet to complete the very important task of creating an evaluation system for the school leader. While Edison has a Principal Performance Appraisal System which would provide the Board with the core of its evaluation, the Board was unaware of the system at the time of the visit and/or felt a need to create its own system. More generally, the program committee/education committee of the Board—which is charged with overseeing the school's education program—is still in its infancy. While it has plans to set forth specific benchmarks and criteria for success by which it can evaluate the school leader and the success of the school program, there was little evidence that these plans have gotten off the drawing Board at the time of the visit.

As part of the charter, the school had indicated five key areas that were to be developed: science and technology; pro-social development; health and fitness; a family wellness center; and research and evaluation. As reported by present Board members, energy, time and money were put into each of the above initiatives. However, there appears to have been little pay-off in terms of academic progress or the core mission of the school to improve student learning and achievement. To the Board's credit, it has refocused its energies on academic achievement in light of this.

Based on available evidence, it also appears that the Board from 2000 through spring 2004 did not have effective avenues through which parents and staff could make their concerns and complaints known, and did not act on those concerns or complaints. As reported by present Board members,

this policy, together with the turnover in the school Principal, led to dissatisfaction by a significant number of parents. Again, as with other initiatives, there have been noticeable improvements in this regard in the school's fifth year. Throughout the life of the charter, the school has had moderately low rates of persistence (students returning from the previous year), averaging approximately 70 percent.

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Finding 1: The Board has provided nominal financial oversight during the term of its first charter.

Finding 2: In the later part of its charter, the school has met its financial reporting requirements and maintained appropriate internal controls.

Finding 3: The school's financial condition is to a large extent dependent on the financial viability of its management partner and a continuance of the relationship.

Over the life of the charter, the Board has provided effective financial oversight and has posted evidence of making decisions that further the school's mission, program and goals (though, as noted in the discussion of the findings relating to organizational viability, the school's focus on health related programs did not appear to have the intended effect of improving student learning and achievement). The school operates pursuant to a long-range fiscal plan and has produced realistic budgets over the term of the charter.

Although it struggled to meet reporting deadlines in the beginning of its charter period, the school has generally complied with financial reporting requirements and submitted annual financial statement audit reports with unqualified opinions indicating that the school's financial statements fairly represent its financial position. Reports have been complete and the school has followed generally accepted accounting principles. The school has established and maintained appropriate internal controls.

The nature of the school's contract with its management company makes it difficult for the school to accumulate assets. Except for an allowance for Board funds, Edison retains all revenue received as compensation for the variety of educational and management services provided. As a result, the school had no capital assets and no net assets as of June 30, 2004. Upon expiration or termination of the agreement between the school and Edison, the school may purchase the property and equipment provided by Edison at its net depreciable value. Under the management company model in which it has operated, the school has not needed a significant accumulation of cash reserves.

4. What Are the School’s Plans for the Renewal Period and Are They Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?

Finding 1: The Charter School of Science and Technology has submitted academic plans for the next charter term that include the same Kindergarten through eighth grade configuration and use the same curriculum design as in the current charter. Evidence gathered at the renewal visit indicates that new initiatives are at the early stages of implementation and constrained by the sheer size of the school.

Finding 2: In its future plans, CSST proposes to continue the current organizational structure. While these plans are feasible and achievable, they may not be reasonable, considering the limited effectiveness of Academy and House leaders.

Finding 3: The school faces significant challenges in regard to maintaining its fiscal viability and there can be no certainty it will meet them.

The renewal application acknowledges that the historical data it presents show a serious lack of progress in attaining the academic accountability goals contained in the original charter. It asserts, however, that the school had implemented significant reforms during the previous two months and the school was now in a position to present a much stronger case for charter renewal.

The school did effect some dramatic changes in school leadership, mission and academic focus, student behavior, and curriculum in that short period of time, but it cannot be determined from the evidence available at this time if they would ultimately lead to “significant reforms.” While each potentially represents a meaningful departure from past practices, none were fully implemented; each would need much further refinement.

The school faces many challenges to successfully implement its five-year plan for the proposed new charter period. There is no assurance that the plan is achievable. The plan is contingent on the school generating sufficient enrollment demand at the lower grades and reaching a suitable agreement with its management company for the proposed new charter period. In addition, the plan has not addressed capital needs and does not articulate a plan for accumulating sufficient cash reserves to operate under a changed relationship with its management partner.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
Renewal Question 1		
Is the School an Academic Success?		
Benchmark 1A	1A.1.1	Absolute Measures (New York State Assessments): The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1.2	Comparative Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
	1A.1.3	Value Added Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
	1A.1.4	NCLB Measure: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
	1A.1.5	Unique Academic Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.

Academic Attainment & Improvement

The Charter School of Science and Technology has met almost none of the key academic outcomes in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics it set for itself. Over the four years of the charter, the school has made limited progress toward its goals. As CSST’s ELA and math results were initially low, the school remains far from achieving the desired level of performance.

For its absolute level of performance on the fourth and eighth grade state examinations in ELA and mathematics, CSST has shown inconsistent progress over its four years of operation. In 2000-01, its first year of operation, the school was at a low level of performance in both ELA and mathematics in both grades and far from its Accountability Plan goal for absolute performance. In comparison to its first year, three years later in 2003-04, it registered slight decreases in both fourth grade examinations and slight

increases in the eighth grade examinations. Generally, each year, fourth and eighth graders who had been in the school for at least two years scored about the same as the entire population in their respective grade levels.

In its comparative level of performance on the fourth grade state ELA and mathematics examinations, CSST has consistently under-performed one comparison school over the four years and scored below its second comparison in two of the four years. Though not presented as a comparison in its Accountability Plan, the school has performed substantially below the Rochester City School District.

In the first two years of CSST's charter, given its up-and-down results on the eighth grade state examinations, it performed below its two comparison schools in ELA and about the same as its two comparison schools in mathematics. In its third year, it performed better than both its comparisons; in its fourth year, it scored higher than one, but lower than the second. Though not presented as a comparison in its Accountability Plan, the school's performance on the eighth grade examinations was similar to that of the Rochester City School District over the four years of the charter.¹³ All in all, whether outperforming or under-performing the comparison schools on a particular administration, CSST's results suggest that its eighth graders have not been prepared for a rigorous high school program. Indeed, these levels of performance leave CSST eighth graders greatly at risk of being able to graduate from high school.

CSST has been adding little, if any, value to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the Stanford 9 and Terra Nova Tests. Reading results on both tests have generally declined from year-to-year, suggesting that CSST's students are not making the same progress as would be expected from the national sample upon which the scoring is based. With the exception of the first spring-to-spring comparison of math results on each test (2001-02 on the Stanford 9 and 2002-03 on the TerraNova), math results have also declined. As a consequence of these declines, CSST has not enabled students to come closer to a desired level of performance on these tests. At the end of the fourth year, CSST students were scoring on average below the 35th percentile in both reading and math, where the 50th percentile is the equivalent of grade-level.

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states the Charter School of Science and Technology's 2003-04 School Accountability Status as: *Charter School in Need of Improvement (Year 1) for Elementary-Level Mathematics*, because less than 95 percent of the grade four enrollment in each 2002-03 accountability group was tested.

Overall, the results indicate that most CSST students are *not* being prepared for high school by virtue of the small proportion who are scoring proficient on the fourth and eighth grade state examinations. The value-added data confirm the instructional program has not enabled students to make progress toward achieving a desired level of performance.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, the Charter School of Science and Technology set outcome measures to demonstrate its academic success in the key subjects of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. The outcome

¹³ In ELA, CSST under-performed the Rochester City School District in the first two years, outperformed the district in the third year and scored about the same as the district in the fourth. In mathematics, CSST performed about the same as the district in the first, second and fourth years. It outperformed the district in the third year. From a broader perspective, these distinctions amount to little difference, insofar as eighth graders in both CSST and the district consistently performed at a low level.

measures include the following three required types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the value-added to student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of student cohort performance on a school-selected standardized test. The following tables indicate the specific outcomes CSST set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹⁴

In addition to being held to these accountability measures, CSST is expected, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to make adequate yearly progress toward enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and math examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues a school accountability report. CSST's accountability status in the most recent report is indicated below.

The three required outcome measures and the NCLB outcome measure constitute the renewal benchmarks for academic attainment and improvement. The school did not have any self-selected academic outcome measures to report student achievement as part of its Accountability Plan.

Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	By the end of the first charter period, 60 percent of students who have been at the Charter School of Science & Technology for at least two years will perform at Level 3 or Level 4 on the New York State English Language Arts Test each year and will thereby be considered proficient.	4	27.9% ¹	16.9%	37.7%	20.4%
		8	12.2% ¹	9.2%	23.0%	18.1%
Math	By the end of the first charter period, 60 percent of students who have been at the Charter School of Science & Technology for at least two years will perform at Level 3 or Level 4 on the New York State Math Test each year and will thereby be considered proficient.	4	44.7% ¹	16.4%	44.4%	46.9%
		8	10.5% ¹	9.4%	20.8%	19.5%
Science	At the conclusion of the first term of the charter, 60 percent of students who have been at the school for at least two years will score at the proficient level on the NYS Science Test, grades 4 and 8. (This is contingent upon the state finalizing its plans to develop such a test.)	4	55% ¹	21%	38%	58%
		8	54% ¹	38%	35%	40%
Social Studies	At the conclusion of the first term of the charter, 60 percent of students who have been at the school for at least two years will score at the proficient level on the NYS Social Studies Test, grades 5 and 8.	5	N/A	74%	30%	48%
		8	N/A	14%	10%	4%

¹Results are for all tested students irrespective of time enrolled.

²Results on the grade 4 science exam in 2000-01 to 2002-03 represent the proportion of students answering a pre-determined number of questions correctly (*i.e.*, the state designated level).

¹⁴ Please note: as 2000-01 was the CSST's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year. In its Accountability Plan, CSST established the Stanford 9 as its value-added test for 2001-02 and the Terra Nova test for 2002-03 and 2003-04, but it continues to administer and report Stanford 9 results.

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	CSST students in Grades 4 and 8 taking the NYS English Language Arts Test will perform equal to or better than other City School District schools that have similar SES, Special Ed, and LEP populations. Specific schools for comparison purposes will be School 16 and School 4 at grade 4 and Freddie Thomas Middle School at grade 8 and/or Nathaniel Rochester Community School, which is a K-8 school. These schools are in the Rochester City School District.	4	CSST	27.9%	16.2%	34.8%	17.3%
			School 4	50.0%	46.5%	38.4%	51.9%
			School 16	22.4%	38.3%	28.7%	33.8%
			Rochester City SD *	42.1%	46.4%	42.9%	42.4%
		8	CSST	12.2%	6.7%	22.6%	17.8%
			Freddie Thomas	20.9%	18.4%	9.0%	13.6%
			Nathaniel Rochester	19.4%	17.3%	15.1%	25.9%
			Rochester City SD *	25.3%	18.3%	17.7%	18.5%
			CSST	44.7%	13.0%	43.7%	41.6%
			School 4	53.5%	52.9%	53.3%	75.0%
Math	All Charter School of Science & Technology students in Grades 4 and 8 taking the NYS Mathematics Assessment will perform equal to or better than other City School District schools that have similar SES, Special Ed, and LEP populations. Specific schools for comparison purposes will be School 16 and School 4 at grade 4 and Thomas Jefferson Middle School at grade 8 and/or Nathaniel Rochester Community School, which is a K-8 school. These schools are in the Rochester City School District.	4	School 16	29.1%	39.2%	40.0%	65.3%
			Rochester City SD *	47.7%	44.9%	57.4%	64.1%
			CSST	10.5%	7.8%	18.5%	18.0%
			Freddie Thomas	8.5%	10.5%	4.2%	16.7%
		8	Nathaniel Rochester	9.3%	8.9%	7.6%	27.2%
			Rochester City SD *	10.6%	12.0%	10.8%	19.0%

* The results for the district are presented as an additional comparison; it is not included in the Accountability Plan.

Value-Added to Student Learning According to Spring-to-Spring Cohort Gains

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	NCE Increase from Previous School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading *	The average mean percentile score for each cohort taking the combined reading sub-tests (total score) of the Stanford 9 Achievement Tests will increase by the equivalent of 3 NCEs against national norms when compared to the previous year's spring administration. 1102-437=665	2	--	N/A	(-9.6)	(-7.9)
		3	--	N/A	(-2.9)	(-4.2)
		4	--	N/A	(-5.2)	0.6
		5	--	N/A	(-0.4)	0.4
		6	--	(-5.0)	N/A	(-2.6)
		7	--	(-8.6)	(-0.7)	(-3.7)
		8	--	(-9.0)	(-1.7)	1.7
		ALL			(-8.2)	(-3.3)
Math *	The average mean percentile score for each cohort taking the combined mathematics sub-tests (total score) of the Stanford 9 Achievement Tests will increase by the equivalent of 3 NCEs against national norms when compared to the previous year's spring administration. Each cohort will be defined as non-exempt students in each grade level who have been in the school for at least two years.	2	--	N/A	6.7	5.3
		3	--	N/A	(-13.1)	(-10.2)
		4	--	N/A	0.1	3.7
		5	--	N/A	3.3	1.4
		6	--	6.8	N/A	(-7.2)
		7	--	(-0.5)	(-9.9)	(-3.6)
		8	--	3.5	(-5.1)	1.5
		ALL			3.8	(-2.9)

* As CSST does not provide a cohort analysis in its renewal application, but presents instead cross-sectional results for all students, the data displayed here are based on an Excel Workbook of the data submitted by the school. While the school sets its outcome measure as cohorts in grades two through eight, the Workbook does not contain all the data necessary for determining the results in each grade. Also, since CSST had a ninth grade only in 2001-02, results are not reported for that grade cohort. N/A indicates missing data.

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	NCE Increase from Previous School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading *	Effective 2002-2003 school year: Students cohorts in grades two and above will demonstrate average progress of at least 3 NCEs per year as measured by mean scores on the Terra Nova (READING subtest.)	2	--	N/A	(-0.2)	N/A
		3	--		(-1.5)	(-6.2)
		4	--		2.2	4.8
		5	--		(-0.7)	(-2.0)
		6	--		0.2	(-1.4)
		7	--		(-1.2)	(-1.1)
		8	--		3.7	4.2
		ALL				0.4
Math	Effective 2002-2003 school year: Students cohorts in grades two and above will demonstrate average progress of at least 3 NCEs per year as measured by mean scores on the Terra Nova (MATH subtest) when comparing spring – spring scores.	2	--	N/A	18.2	N/A
		3	--		(-2.2)	(-11.6)
		4	--		5.0	3.0
		5	--		5.7	(-0.4)
		6	--		3.0	(-2.3)
		7	--		(-2.0)	0.3
		8	--		2.4	5.6
		ALL				4.3

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states the Charter School for Science and Technology's 2003-04 School Accountability Status as: *Charter School in Need of Improvement (Year 1) for Elementary-Level Mathematics*, because less than 95 percent of the grade four enrollment in each 2002-03 accountability group was tested.

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the collection and analysis of student performance data, including data gathered from an analysis of student work pursuant to a set of well-defined and well-aligned standards; ● the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved; ● the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction; ● the regular communication between teachers and administrators of assessment results and a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of those results; and ● the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement. <p>More generally, a school should be able to demonstrate a system where performance standards, instruction, required student work and assessments are integrated and have led to increased student knowledge and skills.</p>
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Under the school’s new administration in the fifth year of its charter, the Charter School of Science and Technology has prioritized the use of data and has more fully implemented existing assessment tools to enable teachers to use data to drive instruction. The school has also recently introduced additional instruments to begin building an organization that provides teachers with ongoing feedback on individual student learning. The centerpiece of this undertaking is a set of baseline assessments, parallel assessments, norm-referenced tests, writing rubrics, and student work samples. The primary tools for gauging student learning are the Open Court Reading assessments for Kindergarten through sixth grade and program-generated subject assessments for grades seven and eight. Edison’s Benchmark assessments are used to readjust and re-teach skills or strands, identify deficits, adjust pedagogy and are not primarily used to gauge student learning. At the time of the renewal visit, the baseline assessments and norm-referenced tests, as well as the Benchmarks, had been fully implemented. While the Benchmark system has remained a central focus of the school’s assessment efforts, it had been in place three months under the school’s new leadership and continued to face some of the same challenges it had confronted during the life of the charter.

The Edison Benchmark Assessment System is a monthly test that students take on a computer. It is scored automatically, giving teachers immediate test results. The Benchmark assessment was designed to provide teachers with ongoing monthly information about the progress of their grade two through eight students toward meeting end-of-grade standards, aligned with New York State and national standards. The intent is to help teachers tailor their instruction to the specific needs of students and help schools work more strategically toward higher achievement.

Over the life of the charter, Institute visitors noted that the Benchmark data offered a general evaluation of school-wide performance. Benchmarks are also used as a diagnostic tool at the beginning of the school year. In contrast to earlier years, CSST is now also using the Benchmark data for individual diagnostic decisions after each month's administration. Based on the test results, students are regrouped for tutoring and enrichment activities. The information is incorporated into individual Academic Intervention Plans and used to identify areas for special remediation.

In the second year, the Institute's End-of-Year Report indicated that the Benchmarks were administered throughout the school and provided statistical tracking of grade-by-grade student performance, which showed that "the majority of students are performing below grade level." While these data offered a general evaluation of school-wide performance, they were not used for specific decision-making on the efficacy of aspects of the instructional program, much less individual student performance. In the third year, teachers were using the results to focus on general skill weaknesses of students, but still had no data on daily instruction's impact on learning.

In the third year of the charter, SchoolWorks stated in its report that the school's Achievement Coordinator sorted the Benchmark results in various ways and distributed them at Leadership Team meetings to all the lead teachers. The Coordinator met with grade-level teams and attended subject area meetings to disseminate the results of particular interest to each group. This administrative support of grade-level teams continues in much the same manner in the fifth year.

Teachers continue to review Benchmark data in House Meetings.¹⁵ The lead teacher, in consultation with Curriculum Coordinators and Academic Directors, determines how the instructional program should be recalibrated to provide reinforcement of skills in which students have shown weakness. The identified skills are positioned grade-wide in the daily "Do Now" remedial activities, as well as for the instructional assignments of subject area specialists, tutors and other ancillary staff.

For example, the third grade team examined the results from the September, October, and November administrations of the test to identify the lowest performing students and the questions (and skills) on which the students scored the highest and lowest. They then used this information to plan strategies to address these skills. As another example, the House 2 Team reviewed second-grade Benchmark data from their House to identify areas of need and discuss how the kindergarten and first grade teachers could better prepare students to learn those skills in second grade. The lead teacher confirmed this while stating that the Benchmark data track student's abilities and skills, make teachers focus on the strongest and weakest students, and provide vertical alignment of the curriculum in Kindergarten through second grades.

However, no one administration of the Benchmarks during the course of the year after September contains a comprehensive set of items that represent all the skills a student is expected to master at that particular grade level, nor a set of items, aligned with a grade's scope and sequence that reflects what students have recently been taught. Rather, it is a hybrid test that provides a monthly update on the extent to which students are mastering specific skills as a proxy for the more general New York State standards. One of the Academic Directors remarked that, since the Benchmark items are randomly selected for each test, they have limited predictive value for student performance on state tests and do not align with pacing charts.

¹⁵ For more on the school's Houses, see Renewal Benchmark 1D.

This type of test restricts the school's ability to evaluate the Benchmark data for immediate and direct feedback on how well teachers have delivered an instructional unit or on how well students have made progress toward meeting state standards. Because of the indirect relationship between the assessment and actual current instruction, the Benchmarks are more useful to identify skill areas for supplementary instructional support, rather than for determining the effectiveness of current, focal classroom instruction. As such, it limits opportunities for teachers to understand whether or not their teaching is effective. Given the lack of teacher strength in the school, such teaching-learning assessment opportunities are sorely needed.

Self-reflective insight into the connection between what teachers have taught and what students have, as a consequence, learned is a critical component of developing their pedagogical practice.¹⁶ The Benchmark system's group decision-making does not support this individual professional development. Further, because the Curriculum Coordinators, rather than the Academy Directors, have the day-to-day responsibility of implementing the assessment program with teachers at their grade-level meetings, there is little opportunity to use teacher assessment of his/her students as a platform for developing pedagogical competence, something the school needs but which is beyond the role of the already overwhelmed Curriculum Coordinators.

The school leadership is aware of these limitations and the need for a variety of additional assessments. The school has continued to administer two norm-referenced tests and has expanded its use of other assessments. The English Language Arts and math Curriculum Coordinators have developed a number of assessments, provided rosters of assessment data to grade-level teams, and helped teachers on the teams to interpret the information.

The ELA Coordinator has prepared detailed rosters of student ELA and math test results on the Student Reading Inventory and the Stanford 9 and TerraNova norm-referenced tests, in which she transformed scores into a four-point scale, paralleling state examination scoring, in order to identify students by the degree to which they are likely not to meet state standards. Using the data, she has helped grade-level teams identify students who are in need of special intervention.

The ELA and math coordinators have also developed and administered baseline assessments to students in all grades but Kindergarten during the first two days of the school year. These assessment results helped teachers generate individual student intervention plans and make grouping decisions for enrichment and tutorial activities. Quarterly follow-up assessments were planned, but no follow-up had been administered at the time of the renewal visit.

CSST has also begun to administer assessments, which parallel and approximate the state assessments in form and format, modified to the appropriate instructional level. Thus far, these assessments have been administered in a few key grades, including the fourth and eighth grades in order to enable teachers to evaluate students' overall performance and their progress toward achieving state standards. Teachers are trained in how to score using rubrics that are aligned to the New York State assessment rubrics. The writing samples are scored by the entire grade level based on the regional scoring model of New York State. Related to this effort is the development of writing assessments in each grade.

¹⁶ A few teachers were observed making these kinds of connections. In one instance, a social studies teacher said: "...there was a gap from yesterday. Most people didn't understand why the people in the South broke away from the North [in the Civil War]. So today we're going to fix that." In another case, a science teacher said: "Yesterday when we were working, I noticed that you were having trouble with that concept. Let's go over it."

Teachers are expected to develop writing assessments in connection with Open Court, the ELA curriculum introduced this school year (see a discussion of the curriculum in the next section). Teachers score student writing samples using rubrics, which were developed over the summer. In a few grades, they reported having received rubrics from the ELA Coordinator and worked together in their grade-level teams to ensure reliability in the scoring.

By integrating writing with reading and by enabling each teacher to instruct his or her entire class, the writing program has potentially a more seamless structure than last year's program. The school plans to align writing rubric assessments within and across grades; however, since the school is at the beginning stages of developing this assessment process, it has not yet done so.

Also, the current evidence suggests that the scoring is not valid and that teachers misunderstand the use of rubrics. For example, on the papers in one grade, all of the four indicators within the rubric were marked the same (*i.e.* all four indicators are scored as 2s, or 3s or 4s). A student who received a 3 on the development of ideas also received a 3 on conventions, and so on for all indicators. Such scoring does not give students a true picture of their strengths and weaknesses in differing writing skill sets.

Posted and graded student writing provide evidence of an admirable effort to use rubrics and standards to evaluate student work. However, the standard of quality implicit in the application of these tools was consistently low. Persistent mechanical and technical errors were often likely to receive approving scores. Numerous pieces of student writing were graded as proficient that clearly were not; rubrics were posted with the student work, but the work was not scored.¹⁷

Primary teachers have student assessment folders that include Open Court and math assessments. However, an examination of assessment folders in the Primary Academy revealed that a great deal of student work was uncorrected and unscored using the writing rubrics (except for Open Court diagnostic assessments). In the Elementary Academy, there was frequent evidence of composition books with uncorrected entries, incomplete student work folders, unscored writing prompts, and inconsistent use of rubrics from folder to folder.

This evidence is similar to findings from the third year report that stated that samples of student work available in notebooks and folders in the classroom did not contain meaningful feedback from teachers, challenges to revise and improve the work, or grading criteria for assessing the piece. These omissions this year may be attributable to the introduction of new assessment procedures and a teaching staff confronting a new curriculum, but they represent missed opportunities to evaluate a critical aspect of student learning and the effectiveness of instruction. Such missed opportunities have been occurring over the life of the charter.

In conclusion, CSST continues to put a great deal of emphasis on Edison's Benchmark assessments, similar to the second or third years of the charter. In contrast to that earlier time, the data are now used to make decisions about individual student interventions. In terms of the criteria set forth above for this renewal benchmark, the Benchmark assessments are systematically administered and are aligned with state standards, even though their predictive value is limited to the extent that any one administration represents discrete skill mastery rather than an indication of an overall performance

¹⁷ As an example from the fourth grade, a publishing (*i.e.*, third) draft was posted on the wall; previous drafts were *not* corrected; and errors persist into the final. The first sentence of the final paper read: "Hi, my name is Troy I am 9 years old I was born in December 29th 1994 [*sic*]." Similar chronic run-ons and lack of punctuation appear throughout the paper. The final draft is graded "3 or 4" on the rubric.

meeting the range of state standards. The evaluation of the Benchmarks in the third year report remains as true now in the fifth year of the charter: they are most useful for group information and have more limited application for assessing the effectiveness of recent classroom instruction and student learning.

The school continues to administer norm-referenced tests and use their data for identifying at-risk students, as well as assessing the efficacy of the school program. The school is committed to using the data for making changes and improvements. While CSST has recently set a priority of using student assessment data for its instructional program and has laid the groundwork for using a rich array of instruments, the data and instruments are not now components of a system where performance standards, instruction, student work and assessments are integrated.

Teachers are left, to a great extent, on their own to administer Open Court assessments. While there are opportunities at house/grade-level meetings to review such assessments, the renewal team found that the focus at these meetings was on the Benchmark assessments and on the Open Court curriculum in general, not on analyzing Open Court assessment results, which would establish the basis of a system for integrating teachers' classroom instruction with students' day-to-day work. In response to these points in a draft of this report, CSST indicates that Edison Curriculum Coordinators and the school's own ELA and Math Coordinators provide many *instructional* supports. Aside from the effectiveness of these supports (see a discussion of professional development below), the renewal visit team found limited evidence of supervisory support for the assessment of day-to-day classroom reading and writing instruction, a critical means for teachers to hone their pedagogical craft. In its absence, the various kinds of assessment instruments and data are likely to have only a modest impact on increasing student knowledge and skills.

<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p> <p>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance standards.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.</p>
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In the fifth year, the curriculum is complete. It is operationalized through regular, focused, grade-level team meetings. CSST has selected a recognized commercial literacy program to support its Edison curriculum. The Principal has wisely determined that the New York State Learning Standards are the foundation, and that the Edison curriculum standards must be aligned with the state standards, rather than the other way around, which was the case in prior years. The literacy program is new to CSST this year; the math program has been the same in the Kindergarten through fifth grades since the school's inception.

Prior to this year, the school had been using the reading program selected by Edison, *Success For All* (SFA), which assigns students to small groups for instructional sessions based on regular and frequent assessments. Students who lag behind are grouped homogeneously by attainment, as are students who excel or have mastered fundamental skills.

According to the Principal, there had been wide-spread dissatisfaction with SFA at the time she assumed her position in July. Indeed, teachers reported that they had not "bought into" the program fully, had been pushing for some time to find an alternative, and conducted a review last year of SFA and other programs. Based on teacher recommendations and consultation with Edison, the Principal and Edison concurred with the decision to convert its Kindergarten through sixth grade reading program from *Success for All* to *Open Court*, which is research-based and has the benefit of enabling teachers to keep children in their own class, rather than following SFA's small homogeneous grouping. Teachers get a sense of ownership and there is less of a burden on out-of-classroom teachers in being responsible for delivering the core daily instruction.

In putting the curriculum into place, the Principal has required that the entire staff become knowledgeable about it. Given this policy, teachers attended intensive professional development during August on the implementation of Open Court. The teachers reported receiving useful grade-specific training. As a follow-up to these initial training sessions, CSST continues to offer grade teams regular day-long professional development with an Edison specialist on the Open Court curriculum. The ELA Curriculum Coordinator, who organizes these sessions, also provides ongoing support to each of the grade-level teams to develop finer knowledge and use of state standards. As such, efforts to make instruction and curriculum implementation standards-driven are more advanced now than at any time in the school's life.

While the school has documentation on the alignment of Open Court with the state standards, it has endeavored to develop a scope and sequence with guidance from Edison that also fills the gaps between Edison's curriculum and the state's standards. Teachers indicated that they have begun using a pacing chart provided by the ELA coordinator.

Besides determining that the curriculum is aligned with state standards, grade-level team meetings also include developing lesson plans. They use the state standards, Open Court and Edison's Benchmarks to guide them. Teachers indicated that they look at adjacent grade curricula when planning. All grades in the primary House pace their lessons simultaneously by time and subject. Scope and sequence pacing is checked by the Curriculum Coordinators once a month at each primary grade level.

As the program selected by Edison for mathematics instruction, *Everyday Math* has been the school's curriculum for the life of the charter. Edison has documented its alignment to state standards. Like Open Court, there is no built-in design for grouping students of similar ability and achievement levels in similar classes. Instead, the program is designed to be offered to heterogeneous classes. Differentiation of instruction is left to the teacher, with resources provided for use with students of varying abilities. CSST has changed its math curriculum from *Everyday Math* to the Prentice Hall *Course 2* and *Course 3* for grades seven and eight. The school reports choosing the curriculum because of its alignment with New York State standards and it offers students a higher level of thinking and conceptual understanding. In addition, it provides an ongoing assessment strand that begins within the lesson instruction and continues throughout the program components.

The math coordinator is responsible for the scope and sequence and has developed a pacing schedule for each grade-level team. In addition, he also conducts classroom observations, providing coaching and individual feedback.

<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p> <p>Strong instructional leadership girds the school’s work in improving student learning and achievement.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has instructional leadership that has demonstrated the capacity to lead the comprehensive implementation of the school’s curriculum and has facilitated the alignment of classroom instruction, learning activities, instructional resources, support, and assessments. Instructional leaders at the school ensure that teacher planning time, lesson development, and internal assessment systems lead to the successful attainment of the school’s mission and academic goals.</p>
	<p>1D.2</p> <p>Quality instruction is evident throughout the school fostering an academic learning environment and actively supporting the academic achievement of children.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark is one in which classroom practice reflects competent teaching and instructional strategies that engage students. The academic learning environment at the school is one in which effective teaching and learning are valued and supported; there is a clear and strong focus on achievement goals, and student and staff accomplishments are recognized.</p>
	<p>1D.3</p> <p>The school has strategies in place to identify and meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals, and students who are English language learners.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has implemented special programs and provides the necessary resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are demonstrably effective in helping students meet goals.</p>

Leadership

In its fifth year, CSST’s new Board hired the school’s fifth Principal. At the time of the renewal visit, the Principal had established a program that holds teachers accountable and gives them an investment in the school. Given her vision of academic achievement, she has released teachers who had found her vision to be incompatible with their own or who were severely deficient in instructional skills. While only hired on July 19th, she contributed to shaping the renewal application and put her stamp on the school’s professional development plans by insisting that Edison provide its best trainers for preparing the school to implement Open Court. She has also focused on developing staff’s ability to understand the curriculum and its relationship to state standards. One of the lead teachers, expressing widely held sentiments, said that with this Principal “everyone knows their job and the mission.” In addition, she indicated that “the new emphasis on the Edison model and what a charter school is changes how you teach.”

The Principal appears to be an effective and experienced school leader. However, the school's size necessitates that much of the burden of instructional leadership falls upon the three Academy Directors, who are the designated instructional leaders of the early childhood, upper elementary, and middle school components of the school. Their responsibilities include reviewing teachers' lesson plans, visiting classes informally, conducting formal evaluations of teachers, and generally monitoring the quality of instruction. Given the size of the school, the Principal assumes a great deal of administrative responsibility, leaving supervision of the teachers to her lieutenants, the Academy Directors.

At the time of the renewal visit, the Primary Academy Director¹⁸ lacked any pedagogical experience in early childhood grades. Further, he had no administrative credentials and had been the Academy Director of the Junior Academy during a period when it was, according to its current Academy Director, totally lacking in order and discipline. The new Junior Academy Director, while more successful in bringing order to the Junior Academy, had an extremely optimistic assessment of her staff, describing teachers as acceptable and key members of her team when they appeared to be inadequate at best. At the Elementary Academy, the leadership of the Academy Director appears to have had a strong positive impact on teachers' ability to deliver purposeful instruction, focused on academic achievement.

The primary unit of organization at CSST is the "House." As the heads of Houses, lead teachers are critically important in providing day-to-day support for the implementation of the instructional program. Lead teachers carry responsibility for many duties for their House, including: planning and facilitating the agenda for daily team meetings, serving as liaison between the House and the school Leadership Team, soliciting help from Curriculum Coordinators, and mentoring new and inexperienced teachers. The lead teachers support instruction at CSST by visiting the classes of their colleagues and coaching or modeling as needed. However, since they have a full teaching load, they are not able to find the time to visit colleagues as regularly as suggested in the school design.

The lead teachers have day-to-day responsibility for leading their grade-level teams in developing curriculum, preparing lesson plans, reviewing assessments, and enhancing classroom management approaches. While they generally appear to be diligent in carrying out the team's daily agenda, the quality and effectiveness of their leadership over new and inexperienced teachers varies. In a school with 28 of 77 teachers hired in the last year and with a number of long-term substitutes, as well as more than one-third of the teachers with fewer than three years experience, the leadership of the lead teachers is critically important.

One lead teacher position was vacant at the time of the visit. Because a number of the leads took the position for the first time this year, they were inexperienced as leaders. Besides absence of leadership background, three of the leads have fewer than four years total teaching experience. In addition, aside from years of experience, the renewal team found that some lead teachers were not strong role models given how they conducted their own classes. While they had good rapport with students and set a strong tone, their instruction lacked a sense of urgency, time was poorly managed, routines were not well-established, and there were low expectations for student performance.

¹⁸ Subsequent to the visit, the Academy Director left CSST for a position in another school. The school reports: "The position of Primary Academy Director was filled on February 7, 2005. The new director is a very well qualified professional... a veteran teacher and administrator with 15 years of experience."

Quality of Instruction

The level of instruction is mixed with notable strength in the Elementary Academy and weakness in the Primary and Junior academies. Many of the school's teachers are still learning their craft. While the school has made an effort to increase its capacity to improve the faculty's skill and proficiency, the number of these teachers presents profound organizational challenges.

Instructional quality at the Elementary Academy was generally strong, with some instances of weakness primarily in the area of class management for new teachers. Pacing of lessons was lively, student engagement was widespread, and the intellectual rigor of teachers' probing questions and task assignments was appropriate. While there were exceptions, in most classes in the Primary Academy, classroom management system had not been well established, instructional time was not well managed, lessons were not focused and well-paced, teachers almost exclusively provided whole-class instruction, and only some informal assessments were corrected and reviewed. The quality of instruction varied in the Junior Academy. In a few classes, instruction was purposeful and students could explain clearly what they were doing, including the role of Essential Questions, posted materials and teacher instruction. In contrast, in numerous classes, instruction was not purposeful and reflected low expectations, classroom order was volatile, and students reported not knowing why they were engaged in a particular activity.

The teachers, especially in the younger grades, lacked a sense of urgency about instructional time. Much of the prime instructional time (*i.e.*, first thing in the morning) appeared to be devoted to other activities (*i.e.*, Morning Meeting, Breakfast, Enrichment, Singing, *etc.*). Teachers were often far off their posted schedules. Interviews with students suggest that no additional activities were added. Morning activities simply took longer. Interviews with students (who could account for each activity of the day) suggest that much instructional time is wasted. For example, in a science class, the entire period was spent copying down definitions.

It is unclear whether or not sufficient time is devoted to Open Court instruction. There is evidence to suggest that insufficient time is allocated given the demands of the curriculum. Open Court requires at least two hours of daily instruction. In no instance did review team members see more than two hours listed on the classroom schedules and often only one hour was indicated. Finally, it appears that the classroom schedules are often not followed. For example, often the teacher was not teaching Open Court when the schedule so indicated.

Given the level of difficulty of classroom assignments and the extent to which students are challenged during lessons, teacher expectations of student performance are generally too low. While there was evidence of high expectations, universal student engagement, and orderly productive standards-driven classrooms in the Elementary Academy, such qualities were less prevalent in the rest of the school. Visitors observed an excessive amount of time spent in ancillary activity (bathroom, singing, and coloring) in place of focused academic instruction in the early grades. Similarly, there was a lack of rigor in classroom assignments in the upper grades with widespread manifestations of an implicit arrangement between students and teacher: if the students do not become disorderly, the teacher will ignore their opting out of the lesson and chattering amongst themselves.

Instruction for At-Risk Students

In the fifth year of the charter, CSST has introduced a number of programs intended to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. Since there is no record of achievement from previous years, it is not possible to determine their effectiveness. In addition to the special education program, the school has instituted an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) for students who are unlikely to meet standards, as well as an Enrichment Program.

According to the renewal application, CSST has set in place strategies to identify and meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals, and students who are English language learners. Teachers attend Family And Student Support Team (FASST) meetings weekly, where individual student's achievements are discussed.

For students who have an identified disability and have an Individualized Education Plan, the school follows procedures set by the Committee on Special Education from the child's home school district. CSST's Special Education Coordinator and consultant teachers have placed these students in inclusive classroom settings to implement the IEP.

An AIP has been developed for each student who scores a Level 1 or 2 on a New York State assessment or whose performance is below grade level, as indicated on an initial or ongoing internal diagnostic assessment. This plan focuses on the student's strengths and weaknesses and the development of skills that they need to be successful. The classroom teachers, lead teachers, and the Academy Director keep copies of each plan. Identified students receive additional support from a tutor or reading specialist in order to improve the skill deficits in ELA and math identified in the AIP.

All third graders participate in an enrichment program each morning. It operates under the auspices of the Curriculum Coordinators who place the students in ten groups, which meet with two reading specialists and a cadre of tutors and para-professionals. Besides monitoring the daily activity, the coordinators prepare a weekly lesson plan and accompanying packets of material for each student, irrespective of group. At the time of the renewal visit, the tutors engaged in a low-level activity (on letter writing) with their respective groups. The activities, reflected low expectations and appeared to be virtually the same for each group even though students were ostensibly grouped according to specific skill deficiency.¹⁹ The reading specialists, who each had larger groups, were not well-prepared and engaged in a discussion with no apparent purpose about evaluating rubrics.

Eighth graders participate in an enrichment program to help them meet state standards on the eighth grade state examinations. Resources are devoted in particular not to students in greatest need but those most likely to be moved up a level on the state tests. While the Junior Academy Reading Coordinator provides support to all weak students, the "high 2s" exclusively get additional pull-out support. The emphasis is on test-taking skills, rather than enhancing the student knowledge base.

¹⁹ Based on a recently administered Student Reading Inventory, after initial grouping based on TerraNova and Stanford 9 results.

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Teaching Staff</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school’s instructional staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will be able to demonstrate that teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success. (While handled under the benchmark for legal and charter compliance, it is important to note that a school must also be able to demonstrate that teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under both federal and state law with few exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with this requirement of law, the school should be able to show that it has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures.)</p>
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A few exemplary teachers are clearly at work in the school, particularly in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades where the teachers appeared to have a strong sense of direction and focus on appropriate academic content and methods.

For the most part, however, the staff is characterized by an array of weaknesses involving instructional proficiency and classroom management skills. There are a great many novice teachers whose development needs are significant. One of the Directors provided an evaluation of each of the teachers in that Academy and then characterized the teachers as having intensive needs, requiring work in planning, technique, and behavior management. A lead teacher suggested that, while colleagues were smart, passionate, and earnest, they lacked skills. Except for three of six special education teachers and two of 55 general education teachers, all the teachers were certified in their subject areas.²⁰

While the fourth-to-sixth grade Elementary Academy has an informed, highly competent Academic Director and strong educators as lead teachers, the leadership in the other two academies and at other grade levels is often inexperienced and not sufficiently effective in developing the teachers’ instructional and management skills.

Teachers with few years of experience have been assigned lead teacher roles for which they are unprepared; others have had long careers and still face day-to-day classroom management challenges. To the extent that they have not fully developed the competence to deliver instruction consistently or the ability to manage their own classrooms effectively, their grade-team leadership is inadequate.

The ELA and math Curriculum Coordinators are competent in carrying out their specific responsibilities and appear to be knowledgeable about their subject matter. However, given that they have only taught for two years and one year respectively, their ability to coach colleagues is limited. The ELA Coordinator was unexpectedly given the assignment of Coordinator in August. One of the Academy Directors has no pedagogical experience at the grade-levels he supervises, constraining his ability to provide effective oversight and instructional support.

²⁰ According to school documents, the uncertified teachers had fulfilled the requisite academic requirements. The school administration was actively pursuing completion of the certification process for them with the State Education Department.

The staff's inexperience and lack of skill has been an issue from early in the charter. In its second year report, the Institute stated: "The Charter School of Science and Technology has a primarily inexperienced staff, whose need for professional development may very well outstrip the resources of a small administrative staff... Several of those faculty members were observed to have improved their craft significantly during the course of this year. However, due to the large size of the teaching staff, many more faculty members continued to need professional development."

Since she became the school leader in July, the Principal has recognized the critical importance of improving the quality of the teaching staff both through professional development (see below) and by replacing incompetent staff. She has been actively engaged in making over the composition of the staff. Of 77 teachers, 16 assumed their positions after August 1st and before September 1st, eight began on or *after* September 1st. Since September, eight teachers have been released. According to the Principal, "if a teacher cannot articulate goals and write student improvement plan, and lacks class management skill, he will be fired... If a teacher knows what they want to do, but not how and classroom shows organization, there is potential, so we would offer mentoring." At the time of the renewal visit, two teachers had mentors and two had improvement plans. In addition, long-term substitutes are teaching several classes, which appear to be among the most disorderly in the school.

The Principal believes that she can overcome the challenges of recruiting quality candidates in Rochester. She claims to have a following in the local area, enabling her to attract new teachers and has an ambitious sourcing strategy to tap the local market. She plans to choose teachers through a hiring committee review process, which includes, if qualified, visiting CSST and teaching a lesson. Because the recently-hired were identified so late, these planned steps could not be followed.

In order to enhance personnel quality, the Principal expressed a desire to institute a variety of innovations, including realigning the staff, creating/abolishing positions, establishing standards in employment contracts, modifying the salary schedule and allocating performance bonuses. These procedures would have to be negotiated with CSST's management company and would only have an impact in the long-run. In the short-run, the staff continues to need comprehensive and sustained professional development, which the school is not now providing.

<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has documented discipline policies and procedures (for regular and special education students) and has consistently enforced those policies. As implemented and enforced, the discipline policy will have promoted calm, safe classrooms where students are required to (and not distracted from) participating fully in all learning activities. Students at a school meeting this benchmark will also generally report a reasonable sense of security. A school will also be able to provide appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.</p>
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CSST’s student behavior has improved significantly from the unstructured, disorderly, and occasionally dangerous environment of the first four years. This is particularly notable in the public spaces, for instance, the cafeteria, hallways and buses. Student behavior is generally appropriate. However, classroom management is uneven and in many classrooms chronic but low-level misbehavior still interferes with instruction.

Historically, the school has experienced violence and disruptions so endemic that discipline records logged 500 fights last year. An Academy Director noted that prior to this year, “staff was defeated. Students were in control.” Administrative behavior management was reactive, generating face-to-face confrontations and ongoing power struggles with students.

Discipline problems have been chronic at the school. After the first year of its charter during which large numbers of students were suspended and many parents withdrew their children, CSST in collaboration with the Charter Schools Institute implemented a corrective action plan designed to address building-wide disciplinary issues. The corrective action plan was implemented in mid-year and laid out specific steps the school needed to take to improve such disciplinary issues. The Institute’s second end-of-year report states that “although the administration made clear and decisive use of strong deterrents and consequences when warranted, many teachers lacked proficiency in setting and enforcing high expectations for behavior in their classrooms.” While the report indicates that the school has made discernable progress toward improving the behavioral climate and had met the terms of its Corrective Action Plan, nonetheless, it found that the behavioral climate, and its ability to support rigorous instruction, continued to warrant the attention of the school’s administration and faculty.

In the third year, the school fully implemented a “three tier” discipline system, which provided different levels of consequences for student infractions. The system included the hiring of a Student Intervention Specialist who worked with teachers and administrators to implement the system. SchoolWorks’ Third-Year Report describes the effectiveness of the new discipline system “in the apparent reduction in the number of suspensions since last year,” but that, while “the system has promoted improved order, students and some teachers complained that the system is not consistently implemented by all teachers across the school. School leaders recognized the need for continual monitoring and follow-up support for all staff members.”

Despite the improvements over the first three years, by the fourth year, the incidents of fighting and the need to suspend large numbers of students remained. In addition, in the fourth year, the school experienced 35 bomb threats as well as a number of break-ins.

In this context, the new Principal began at the outset of the fifth year to work with staff and parents to make over the school environment. Since September, the school has implemented a number of practices and programs to ameliorate the conditions. Students participated in an orientation on the first school day to introduce and reinforce academic and behavioral expectations. Among a number of initiatives, the school also established a Code of Conduct and disciplinary policies and procedures to ensure appropriate student behavior and interaction, reconfigured the Behavioral Support Team, changed the policy on in-school suspension to focus on instruction and learning, created a Parent Center, staffed by parent consultants and parent liaisons, to respond to parent concerns. In addition, the school instituted reading activity during lunchtime and bus travel to develop social competencies and promote literacy.

Students now read on the bus, with reading mentors making sure students engage in the prescribed activity. Also lunch room and dining halls have mentors, where students are expected to read after finishing their meals. In the Junior Academy, if students leave a classroom, they now carry agendas, which track their movement. Escorts from “The Village” (the parent association), have helped to minimize student wandering in the school. Substantial resources have been devoted to security.

In general, the renewal team found students to be well-behaved in the hallways and public spaces. The school appears to be safer though it is too early to determine whether the current state will be sustained after four years of potentially dangerous conditions. Still, even when students are safe in their classrooms, interruptions and disruptions remain chronic at most levels.

In the Primary Academy, novice teachers are attempting to teach above a chronic low-level of noise and student off-task behaviors. The school discipline system in the primary grades is based on the color codes of red, yellow and green. Movement of a student-named clothespin to one of the colors’ disks indicates to all present where the student ranks behaviorally in the classroom. In at least half of the classes observed, students were at times unresponsive to teachers’ requests for order. Often teachers simply taught over student chatter.

One teacher who was reported by both the Principal and the Primary Academy Director as needing assistance with classroom management had had no professional development to assist him in developing classroom management skills. He said that he has gotten the message “You are the teacher; take care of the issue.” He reported that every year the professional development on classroom management has been conducted by the same person (a former behavior support person at the school) and that it is ineffective. It appears that many teachers have not learned how to employ positive behavior management systems in their classrooms. In its response to a draft of this report, CSST indicates that while “student behavior has significantly improved in the classrooms (and that students are now well-behaved in the hallways and public spaces), more time is needed to fully implement these reforms and to see their full benefit on learning.”

In contrast to these grade levels, in the Elementary Academy, students in classes were well behaved, attentive, polite and generally engaged in the class work. Hallways on the third and fourth floor were quiet and transitions observed during the visit were orderly and efficient. In many of these classrooms, teachers utilized positive reinforcement systems to maintain classroom order and engagement. For example, in one classroom, the class earned or lost points according to their behavior. Twenty-five points by Friday earned the class a “Celebration” filled with checkers and math games. The renewal team observed no such system of positive reinforcement in Primary or Junior Academy classrooms.

Among the classes observed in the Junior Academy, classes ranged from one class that was orderly and productive with tight classroom management to a number of classes with no semblance of control. In many classes, there was some order but the instruction demanded a low-level of performance for middle school. In most classes, students were not engaged, many students were not participating, and there was a general level of apathy. The Academic Director characterized most of the teachers as having limited classroom management skills.

For the “Drop Everything and Read” activity in a lead teacher’s class, the students did very little reading. There was a long, disorderly transition at the end of the period. The teacher admonished some of the many students who were wearing jackets, which violates the school uniform rules. These occurrences are mentioned, because they suggest that while the school has established a modicum of order and in certain respects provides a vastly improved atmosphere from an earlier period, the discipline policies have not been sufficiently implemented to promote full participation in learning activities and to enable teachers to completely capitalize on instructional time.

<p>Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1G.1</p> <p>The school’s professional development program aligns with the school’s mission, assists teachers in meeting students’ academic needs and school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning and/or teacher content knowledge.</p> <p>Professional development offerings at a school that meets this benchmark are aligned with the school’s educational philosophy and are effective in helping teachers improve instruction. Most importantly, professional development practices at the school are a priority of the school leadership and buttress the instructional program, meet student learning needs and result in increased student achievement. The school’s calendar reflects that professional development and instructional planning are a high priority. A school should also be able to demonstrate that necessary support for inexperienced teachers is available. Teachers and school leaders report professional development activities have resulted in gains in teacher pedagogic content, knowledge, and skills and this expertise has led to increased student academic achievement.</p>
	<p>1G.2</p> <p>The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement that supports the school’s ability to reach the goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has leaders who spend extended time in classrooms. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel, support, and opportunities to increase the instructional skills and content knowledge required for the school to meet its academic goals.</p>

The Charter School of Science and Technology has re-designed its professional development program to emphasize the importance of instructional practice in accelerating student achievement. The Principal has made professional development a priority insofar as she has worked with Edison, the school’s management company, to provide top-flight professional developers, including Edison’s National Achievement Coordinator to enhance teacher understanding of “a culture of achievement.” In addition, to providing concentrated Open Court training (Kindergarten through six) for three days during the annual staff development period in August, implementation of the ELA program is buttressed with direct professional development support from Edison.

Most Primary and Elementary Academy teachers report participating in Action Research conference calls regarding Open Court with the Edison staff developer twice a month. They provide expert guidance focused on overarching topics for the Open Court program but also preserve time to address individual unique problems. Overall, the reports are very positive. Teachers find the Edison staff developer to be helpful and responsive and report that she provides necessary information and that she communicates with the ELA Coordinator to ensure that teacher needs are met.

The embedded professional development described by teachers in the Primary and Elementary Academies are directly linked to delivering the instructional program. In working together to develop lesson plans, grade parallel assessments, review results of Benchmark Assessments, and discuss Open Court conference calls, the grade-level teams

enhance their skill in delivering the program, and thereby develop professionally. While the Academy Directors monitor these activities, because of the size of the school, the first-line of daily leadership is provided by the lead teachers, who become the primary staff developer of team members.

The lead teacher-support model may be effective to the extent that the incumbents are skillful educators, knowledgeable of the subject area, and experienced as leaders. While some of the lead teachers have the first two qualities, few have had leadership experience.

At best, the approach provides unthreatening peer coaching in a large school with a thin leadership structure. In one Academy, first year and new teachers reported that they receive generous support from their colleagues during daily House meetings and from their Academy Director and lead teacher through informal walk-throughs followed by written and oral feedback.

On the other hand, the leads may be less effective because of a lack of clarity about their roles as team coach and mentor. In another Academy, one lead teacher reported that she wanted the assignment because she has good classroom management and data skills. Part of her role as lead is to “observe and evaluate” teachers. She asks teachers for feedback about her role as lead teacher. The Academy Director focuses on her leadership role and not her teaching. Another lead teacher reported that a substitute covers her class, so she can do teacher observations. She finds opportunities to share, but does not want to be “a dictator.” Another lead conducts informal evaluations of her team’s teaching techniques and provides feedback. She says: “I’ll help a teacher until it begins to hurt children or until I see no improvement in their attitude.” CSST reports that the Academic Accountability Committee will work with the Principal to define the criteria for appointment of lead teachers and to clarify the responsibilities of this position.

Teachers expressed appreciation for the ELA Coordinator, whom they called a great resource. With some teachers expressing a desire to have the coordinator observe and provide feedback on Open Court instruction, they noted that she is “stretched too thin.” Most of her professional development efforts are at House meetings where she coordinates and follows up on, the Open Court training, and devotes time to working with teams in reviewing Benchmark data. The math Curriculum Coordinator has written up numerous classroom observations of math lessons. The evaluations provide extensive criticism on the quality of math lessons, but because he is not a supervisor, they do not provide guidance on what immediate remedial steps a teacher should take.

In its fifth year, CSST has made a consistent effort to identify those teachers in need of improvement. The Principal has established a mentoring system with retired teachers working one-on-one with teachers who face challenges but would benefit from direct, ongoing support. At the time of the renewal visit, two teachers had mentors. Other teachers with shortcomings but promise are given improvement plans, which are developed under the auspices of an Academy Director, in consultation with the Principal. The Academy Directors refer teachers of concern to the Principal, who observes them and then directs the Directors to provide particular support.

The Academy Directors conduct formal evaluations of the teachers twice annually. The first set was just completed at the time of the renewal visit. They also undertake additional formal evaluations, as well as informal evaluations, selectively with the teachers who have been identified as ineffective and in need of intensive scrutiny. While the evaluations are comprehensive and thoughtfully composed, there is little evidence of follow-up to the assessment. Specific findings were not reviewed in subsequent evaluations of the same teacher.

The concern for professional development is manifest in the requirement that teachers submit Professional Growth Plans at the beginning of the year. Academy Directors review them at the time of submission, and they review the Plan with each teacher during their mid-year evaluation and adjust the Plan as needed. Some teachers reported a desire to meet with their Academy Director to review their plans and progress towards meeting their goals more often during the year. In addition to personal goals, teams set House goals, which presumably are addressed collectively during the course of the school year.

The Principal suggested that the teacher improvement plans and the mentoring program represent an aggressive time line to drive achievement. However, the scope and scale of these efforts are so great, given the number and needs of the teaching staff, that they outstrip the resources that are now available, even with an administration that is strongly committed to it. Indeed, the school has not addressed the significant professional development needs of many novice teachers. For example, several teachers in one Academy, which the Principal and Academy Director identified as needing professional development support, reported receiving no such professional development.

In the first four years of the charter, professional development was ineffective, based on low student achievement scores and lack of improvement. Now in the fifth year, a school administrator observed: "We are not going to have a great school unless teaching is excellent." Given this sentiment, the school has made professional development a priority. Nevertheless, the professional development program appears to be inadequate to address the scale of the school's needs. With the skill limitations and/or inexperience of many lead teachers, the number of teachers needing support, and the focus of Edison training during the summer before many teachers are hired; the school faces serious challenges in developing its staff.

In response to a draft of this report, CSST indicates:

The Professional Development Program has been designed to meet the broad scope of needs of our faculty for intensive training and development and provides a broad array of opportunities for professional growth. Central to our teacher development efforts is our Professional Development team, which is led by our Principal and composed of the three Academy Directors, the Assessment Director (formerly the Science and Technology Director), the ELA and Math Coordinators, Technology Specialists and outside mentors.

This team provides the following forms of teacher development and support:

- Twice-monthly professional development sessions presented by the Principal, Academy Directors, Assessment Director and outside subject matter experts.
- Attendance at external trainings sponsored by organizations such as Monroe County BOCES #2, the New York Charter Schools Association, Rochester City School District and Edison Schools, Inc.
- Modeling, coaching and counseling by the Principal, Academy Directors, the ELA and Math Coordinators and Lead Teachers.
- Professional development in-house meetings with the frequency determined by issues and concerns identified by Lead Teachers, Academy Directors or collectively by teachers in the house.
- Faculty study group that meets weekly for reading and discussion of literature relevant to urban education and dialogue with invited experts.
- Cross-Academy training, such as the training on teaching methods to prepare students for the New York State assessments which was provided by the fourth grade instructional team for second and third grade teachers.

- Weekly meetings of Directors (Academy Directors, Assessment Director and Compliance Director) to build instructional and management support capacity and share best practices in educational administration.
- Development of a Professional Growth Plan by each teacher, which is reviewed at a mid-year meeting between the teacher and her/his Academy Director.
- Two formal observations of each teacher’s classroom practice are conducted and documented with recommendations to address areas of performance in need of improvement and are followed by a meeting to provide feedback to the teacher observed. The findings and recommendations of the first meeting are reviewed during the second series of meetings to monitor progress in meeting goals.
- Several faculty members are currently working toward their master’s degree or doctorate.

In addition to the professional development program that CSST has in place for its faculty, administrators have provided specific tools and techniques to promote rigorous instruction such as curriculum pacing, scope and sequence, and grade-level lesson planning to address the scale of needs of many of our teachers. Professional development sessions, ongoing support, and frequent monitoring of instructional delivery practices are used to ensure the effective use of these tools.

While this list appears to represent an extensive and comprehensive professional development program,²¹ the effectiveness of these activities is still at issue, given the size of the school, the culture that had existed for the first four years of the charter, the competence of the rank and file members of the teaching staff, and the quality of the instructional leadership itself in providing direct, ongoing support to the teachers. Moreover, as noted elsewhere, the inspection team did not find that the professional development supports were adequate and that this was manifested in the low level of rigor in many classrooms.

²¹ As part of its response to the draft report, CSST also submitted an array of documents, slide shows, and spreadsheets to demonstrate the amount and extent of support provided in ELA and mathematics. According to the cover statement of the submissions, they are “important support documents attesting to the strength of the current academic program and the supports already in place” and are provided by Edison schools and the school’s respective subject area coordinators.

In ELA, the evidence consists of a PowerPoint presentation of plans internal to Edison on rolling out its New York State ELA program, as well as a number of other Edison-produced PowerPoint presentations on aligning ELA instruction to state standards. In addition there are a number of documents to guide teachers in delivering instruction (*e.g.*, pacing charts, alignment of content with standards). Finally, an Excel workbook contains spreadsheets of standardized test results for students by grade level, as well as overall performance by grade-level on these assessments. In math, the evidence includes: PowerPoint presentations on teaching number facts, concepts, and procedures; a document aligning school’s math curriculum by grade with the key ideas in the state standards; and of a variety of examples of the format for solving word problems, and math rubrics.

While this evidence indicates that Edison and the school coordinators have provided at least some support, it does not in itself attest to the effectiveness of these materials in professional development or in the strength of the current academic program, especially in regards to the quality of the lead teachers and other academic support personnel in providing day-to-day coaching and professional development to the many teachers in need of that support.

Renewal Question 2

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A School Specific Non-Academic Goals	2A	The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.
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Data Analysis Goal

All teachers and administrators will consistently gather and use data on student learning to better tailor instruction to the specific needs of the Charter School of Science and Technology students as evidenced by the following sub-goals:

Sub-Goal: All teachers will use diagnostic assessment to inform/adjust daily classroom instruction to meet the needs of students.

Measure 1: One hundred percent of students will participate in the monthly on-line Benchmark Assessments, a tool designed to inform instruction.

According to the school’s renewal application, this goal has not been met. Participation has risen from 71 percent in year one to 89 percent in year four. The school states that problems with the on-line program as well as teacher implementation impeded the goal. The renewal application indicates that the school discovered in 2003-04 that teachers did not fully understand how to use the results to drive student instruction. Professional development was provided to the teachers that year.

Measure 2: One hundred percent of teachers will participate in monthly diagnostic discussion in-house meetings on Benchmark results that tailor instruction to student need. House Logs of discussion and findings will document participation.

The school’s renewal application did not address this measure.

Sub-Goal: Staff at CSST will communicate effectively with families regarding student performance.

Measure 1: Eighty percent of families will participate in Quarterly Learning conferences, a process that involves students, their parents, and teachers in quarterly assessment of progress as measure against standards, and results in individual goal setting for students.

According to the school’s renewal application, records of participation were not kept until 2003-04. The goal of 80 percent was met only in the first quarter of that year.

Measure 2: One hundred percent participation in data analysis by staff and documentation of implications for instruction submitted to Achievement Coordinator and Achievement Committee.

According to the school's renewal application, documentation has been maintained in an inconsistent manner due to a lack of instructional leadership and accountability.

<p>Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B</p> <p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has school Board members, parents, teachers, school leader(s) and community partners that consistently present evidence of the school's success with reference to the school's mission and the key design elements included in its charter application. Key elements of the school's design are well implemented and the school's academic results, governance, and instructional practices reflect the mission of the school.</p>
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According to the CSST's renewal application, the school has been partially faithful to its mission by creating an alternative public education opportunity in Rochester. The school acknowledges falling short in fulfilling its commitment to providing students with the world class education it envisioned to help students attain high academic achievement and thereby narrow the gap between minorities and non-minorities, as well as between the genders, particularly in the areas of science and technology.

The renewal application lists the following set of reasons, derived from an analysis of Edison's national curriculum specialists, for impeding the proper deployment of its instructional model:

- a lack of teacher confidence in and support of the academic program;
- resistance to regrouping of students and a strong preference for literacy centers instead of the *Success for All* Reading Program customarily used by Edison School;
- teachers' disinterest in implementing appropriate modification in instructional practices to meet individual students' needs;
- the failure of administrators to hold teachers to a high level of instructional accountability;
- a perception by teachers that administrators lacked expertise and were out of touch with the needs of students and staff; and
- a constant state of turmoil at the school, centering around the Reading Program, lack of student management, and the actions and evaluations of Curriculum Coordinators regarding program implementation.

The original charter also included enhancements to the Edison model in five areas: science and technology, pro-social development, health and fitness, a family wellness center, and research and evaluation. According to the school's renewal application, some of these initiatives actually diverted resources from the priority of student achievement. For this reason, the new Board has adopted a policy to fold into the overall school operation only those initiatives in these areas which will directly promote academic achievement. External research or evaluation will be deferred until student achievement goals are reached.

The Board of the school was able to articulate in an interview the mission of the school and indicated that the success of the school in meeting its mission was largely dependent on the school's success in meeting its academic goals. As set forth more fully in the discussion of Benchmark 2C.1-2C.2, the governance practices of the school reflect the mission of high academic achievement. The Board has taken consistent actions to bolster academic achievement, including providing such resources as the School Director has asked for. This is particularly true in the fifth year of the charter.

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance (Board of Trustees & School Leadership)</p>	<p>2C.1</p> <p>The Board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics) and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school’s charter. Where possible, the Board has avoided creating conflicts-of-interest. The school Board has also maintained and abided by the corporation’s by-laws. In addition, a Board meeting this benchmark will have actively sought information from the staff, parents, community and student populations. The system for hearing such views and concerns will have been consistently implemented so that all views and concerns were appropriately heard and acted upon. The Board will have published, reviewed and communicated policies annually and currently maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p>
	<p>2C.2</p> <p>The Board and school leadership clearly articulate the school’s mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</p> <p>To fully meet this benchmark, school leaders and Board members should be able to evidence a strong understanding of the school design and demonstrate that they have referred to it regularly in managing and governing the school. Moreover, the Board and the school’s administration should have deployed resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school. At the Board level, the Board should have a process for selecting both Board members and the school leader or school leadership team that is timely and effective and such process should result in a stable and effective Board and leadership team. The Board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school Board and school leadership should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.</p>

As the Board of Trustees was reorganized in the spring/summer of 2004, evidence regarding these Renewal Benchmarks is separated into the period prior to the reorganization and the period thereafter.

Pre-Reorganization

In the first four years of the charter, and, in particular, from 2002 to early 2004, the Board of Trustees experienced fairly rapid turnover (renewal application, page 7; interview with Lyn Bedell and Joe Krys, spring 2004). As a result, and as confirmed in an interview with the past president and vice-president, the Board essentially was controlled and run by the President and Vice-President, who by 2003 held all four officer positions (President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary). This arrangement did not contravene the by-laws. However the consolidation of power in two persons was augmented by the fact that the President and Vice-President cohabitated.

In addition to turnover at the Board level, the Board hired and fired four Principals between 2000 and 2004 (see renewal application, page 7). Based on available evidence, including interviews with past and present Board members, it does not appear that the Board during that time had set forth criteria for the hiring of the School Principal or for dismissal of the Principal. Moreover, the Board acknowledged that it did not provide for adequate time to plan and conduct a search in order to maximize the possibility of retaining a highly-qualified school leader after terminating the previous leader.

In the school's fourth year, the school's Board retained a highly-qualified retired executive (who was at that time serving on the Board), who, however, had little if any experience as a school Principal, and in particular no experience as an instructional leader. This hire was against the advice of the school's ESP (Edison). This individual left the position of Principal in spring 2004; as a result the school was without a Principal during a significant part of the fourth year, and instructional leadership defaulted to three Academy Directors during this period. Whether as a result of the above, or unrelated, the Board, as reported by present Board members, tended as at critical points to involve themselves in the day-to-day operations of the school.

As part of the charter, the school had indicated five key areas that were to be developed: science and technology; pro-social development; health and fitness; a family wellness center; and research and evaluation. As reported by present Board members, energy, time and money were put into each of the above initiatives. However, there appears to have been little pay-off in terms of academic progress or the core mission of the school to improve student learning and achievement. In 2002, the Board sought a revision to the school's charter, limiting the grades it would provide instruction in to Kindergarten through eight. The Board sought this change in recognition of the need to concentrate resources in elementary and middle school—and the fact that it was necessary to master the Kindergarten through eight program before providing secondary education.

Based on available evidence, it also appears that the Board from 2000 through spring 2004 did not have effective avenues through which parents and staff could make their concerns and complaints known; and did not act on those concerns or complaints. Based on interviews with parents and past and present Board members, it was previously the practice of the Board to allow people to address the Board; however, it was the practice of the Board not to respond but to sit silently. As reported by present Board members, this policy, together with the turnover in the school Principal, led to dissatisfaction by a significant number of parents.

In terms of conflict-of-interests, the Board did maintain a policy and abided by it. In one instance the Board's decision to contract with a former Board member to provide consulting services suggests that the Board was not sufficiently sensitive to issues of appearance, including failing to document through a third-party evaluation the fair market value of the services to be provided under the contract. While there is no suggestion that the price charged was not fair market value, the Board rescinded the contract when questions of appearance were raised.

Post-Reorganization

The Board was reorganized in the spring/summer of 2004, after recognition that the school had made little if any significant progress in meeting its academic accountability goals, and after complaints from parents. Only one member who had served on the Board previous to the reorganization, a member who was instrumental in effecting that change, now serves on the Board.

In the few months that the reorganized Board has been in place, it has taken the following actions:

Put in place a timely system for the selection of a school leader. This system allowed input from staff and parents, through the use of a nominating committee. Final selection was left to the Board. The process resulted in the hiring of the present School Director, who has gained the confidence of the Board, the staff and teachers.

Reshaped the mission statement of the school: as now constituted, the school's mission to improve student learning and achievement is clear. The Board is able to articulate that mission with precision.

Emphasized the importance of student achievement in the core academic subjects (ELA, math, science and social studies) and shifted resources from other areas (including the five focus areas) to support that emphasis. In particular, the school leader reports that requests for additional resources have been quickly approved by the Board.

Placed greater emphasis on retention of Board members. While too early to tell, the Board appears to have stabilized its membership and broadened the membership.

The Board however has yet to complete the very important task of creating an evaluation system for the school leader. More generally, the program committee/education committee of the Board is still in its infancy. While it has plans to set forth specific benchmarks and criteria for success, by which it can evaluate the school leader and the success of the school program, at the time of the visit, there was little evidence that these plans have gotten off the drawing Board. The Board reported in an interview that this was due in part to health issues regarding one key Board member (a former educator) and acknowledged the importance of moving forward quickly with this task.

<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by survey results as well as the volume of parents who choose the school to provide education for their children and the degree to which parents persist with that choice over the child’s academic career.</p> <p>The school that satisfies this benchmark will be able to show through generally accepted surveying standards and practices that a large majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school are satisfied with the school. As only a well-informed parent can be meaningfully satisfied, the school must be able to show that it has provided to parents detailed and accurate information about their child’s performance as well as the performance of the school as a whole. The school should also be able to provide data on application lottery, enrollment and persistence rates to demonstrate that large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school, and far more importantly, keep their children enrolled year-to-year. Ideal survey data will also provide an explanation for the persistence rate experienced by the school.</p>
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While The Charter School of Science and Technology generally met its Accountability Plan goal for parental satisfaction as measured by parental surveys, persistence rates over the life of the charter have been low. In the fourth year, parental dissatisfaction with the direction of the school was a critical factor in the Board being reorganized.

Over the life of the charter, the Harris Interactive Survey has been provided to the stakeholders of CSST. The survey ranks satisfaction on a scale of one to ten, with ten representing the highest level of satisfaction. According to the renewal application, each year there has been an increase in satisfaction by the parents as well as the number of parents participating in the school survey. In 2000-01, 54 parents responded to the survey; in 2002-03, 636 parents responded. By the end of the 2002-03 school year, all areas received a rating of 7.5 or higher, except for “the bus” which has been consistently low. In the 2004-05 school year, bus monitors have been hired, making the buses safer and providing a learning environment for students. The results for the 2003-04 school year had not been reported at the time of the renewal application.

Students surveyed consistently gave low marks to the school’s equipment and facilities, school atmosphere, and bussing; however, all response categories rose from the first year to the third year of the charter, albeit not to the 7.5 satisfaction mark. The number of students responding to the survey fluctuated over the first three years of the charter between 465 and 556 students.

According to the school’s renewal application, it has met the retention goal in each of the past two years, and has exceeded the re-enrollment goal for the three years for which data are available. The percentage of students remaining at CSST from June to September increased from 82.6 percent in 2001 to 89.7 percent in 2003. However, the school calculates its retention rates for the school year using a bifurcated method: from September to June and then from June to September. It does not consider the proportion of students who return to the school compared to all the students enrolled during the previous year. According to the Excel Workbook that the school submitted as an addendum to the renewal application, the persistence rate is about 70 percent. That is, according to the Workbook, about 70 percent of the students enrolled in each of the first three years of the charter returned to the school the following year. This is a moderately low persistence rate.

<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p> <p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>
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As part of a compliance review, the Institute reviewed steps the school took in response to compliance issues raised in the New York State Education Department’s Third Year Monitoring Report, which outlined certain instances of non-compliance with the school’s charter or law. The school was in compliance or coming into compliance with most of the issues raised by the State Education Department, including teacher certification, student immunization records, provision of alternative instruction, public notification of Board of Trustees meetings, and parental notification of suspensions. We also note that the State Education Department indicated that as of January 28, 2005, the school was not in compliance with the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) in that the school had not submitted a school safety plan pursuant to Education Law section 2801-a.²²

The school has not fully complied with notification provisions in the Monitoring Plan in its Charter, especially with respect to notification regarding changes in Board members, Principals and by-laws. In the past, the school had a mixed record of compliance with submitting items to the Institute, but has improved in 2003 and 2004. Another area of non-compliance is the school’s failure to obtain proper background check clearance pursuant to the New York Education Law for all the bus monitors hired by the school.

The school also has no working policy, notice or training regarding the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). As a result, parents and staff do not know of access to the full range of available school records. Otherwise, the school has generally implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law and has abided by them.

Early in its charter, the school was placed on a corrective action plan based on recurring disciplinary problems at the school. The school substantially fulfilled the terms of that plan, which was lifted by the Institute. While the number of suspensions is still appreciable, there has been no need to re-institute corrective action in the area of discipline.

The school also has an effective relationship with independent counsel, and at least one Board member is a lawyer, who assists in legal matters. The school’s management partner also provides certain legal advice, and there is evidence that the Board is aware of the potential for a conflict of interest with such counsel.

²² On February 10, 2005, the State Education Department advised CSST in writing of its receipt of a CSST school safety plan.

With the exceptions noted above, the school otherwise appears to have been, and presently appears to be, generally in substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law (e.g., I.D.E.A., F.E.R.P.A.), and its by-laws.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3A	3A	The Board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school’s mission, program and goals.
Board Oversight		

The Board has relied heavily on its management partner for the overall financial management of the school. The Board has provided nominal financial oversight. For most of its existence, the Board did not have a finance committee or budget committee but instead acted primarily as a whole. It is not clear that financial resources have always been allocated to cover the academic program and school-based initiatives as directed by the Board or the School Principal.

Monthly financial reporting by the school’s management partner has been opaque. At least one former Board member, as well as the school’s independent auditor, have attempted to enhance the clarity and transparency of such reporting with limited success. Over the course of the school’s charter, there has been limited evidence that the financial reporting by the management partner provides the Board with an effective tool to oversee the financial operations of the school. The school and its management partner are actively pursuing ways to improve the usability of financial reporting.

The school has experienced staffing upheavals and turnover throughout its existence. Accompanying this turnover has been significant gaps between when certain key personnel left the school and when they were replaced. Such gaps accrued monetary benefits to the school’s management partner, but strained the school’s operational continuity.

Recently, the Board has formed a finance committee. The committee meets once a month on weeks different from Board meetings. The meetings are open to the public and are attended by Board members, teachers, administrators and Edison staff. The committee reports out to the Board at each Board meeting. Recommendations are presented to the full Board for its action.

Budget to actual fiscal reports are prepared by the school’s management partner and reviewed by the Board on a monthly basis. Monthly monitoring of the resource allocations by the Board and its finance committee will help to ensure that the academic program is fully supported.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3B
Budgeting and Long
Range Planning

3B

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.

The school has operated pursuant to long-range plans beginning with the five-year plan included as part of its charter application. Originally chartered to grow to 1276 students in grades Kindergarten through 12, the school obtained a revision to its charter to serve the same number of students in grades Kindergarten through eight. Historically, the school has relied considerably on its management partner to develop long-range plans. Currently, the finance committee has a sub-committee that deals with capital development planning. The sub-committee has identified needs related to facility improvements, expansion and equipment.

The school has also relied heavily on its management partner for assistance in developing its annual budget. The budget is monitored and there is evidence of Board discussions and involvement throughout the process. However, as noted under Benchmarks 3A and 3E, the lack of clarity in the management partner's reporting makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the ongoing reporting.

Due to the nature of the school's contract with its management partner, the management partner bears the risk of budget overruns. There are no indications that the management partner has had to endure any significant cost overruns during the course of the charter.

Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?

**Benchmark 3C
Internal Controls**

3C

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.

The school has been marginally effective in establishing appropriate internal controls and procedures. While the school’s management partner has extensive policies and procedures under which it operates, the school has not, until recently, established or adopted procedures at the school level. In the last year, the school’s management partner has moved to a new financial support model. The Institute has concluded that the new model provides limited site-based support and has been ineffective in providing the school sufficient support.

The school has not addressed management letter comments that it has received from its independent auditor in a timely manner. The school represents that each of the prior year recommendations, along with any FY 2004 recommendations, will be thoroughly discussed with the Board finance committee during FY 2005 and, if agreed to, will be implemented immediately. Further, it represents that all future management letter recommendations will continue to be monitored for implementation by the Board’s finance committee. At the time of its visit, the renewal team did not see evidence that this process had been implemented.

In response to a draft of this report, the school asserts that its Finance Committee has put in place a process to monitor the recommendations of its independent auditor and that the Committee executed the first action in this process by crafting an appropriate response to the FY 2004 management letter, directing its management partner to transmit the response to the auditor. The Institute cannot confirm this assertion.

The school has experienced numerous instances of theft resulting in substantial security costs to combat such occurrences. According to the school’s management partner, the added security has been successful, but costly.

Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3D
Financial Reporting

3D

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.

Generally, the school has met its financial reporting requirements. The school acknowledges that during the first 12-18 months of operations, there were instances in which a financial report may not have been submitted on time, or to the proper agency. Otherwise, the school has filed its annual financial statements and quarterly financial reports on a timely basis with minor exceptions. However, the school filed its federal Single Audit for 2003 after the statutory deadline.

Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor's opinion, 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.

Financial transparency has been defined as the full, accurate and timely disclosure of information. The financial transparency of the school is limited due to the financial reporting structure used by its management partner. As a result, interim financial reporting has been a mixed bag of actual and estimated expenses. Year-end reports typically show a large amount in its statement of functional expenses as simply "Administrative and other overhead expenses reported by Edison Schools, Inc." This presents some complications when comparing fiscal performance of the school with other charter schools and presents challenges for the Board in assessing the performance of its management partner.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3E
Financial Condition

3E

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).

The school has no net assets and no long-term debt. In its renewal application, the school has noted that cash flow concerns are negligible throughout the year, as a result of an agreement with its management partner. All school expenditures (personnel and non-personnel) are paid by the management partner as needed, and are not contingent upon the receipt of funds by the school or remittance to the management partner. This working capital/cash flow service is included in the management partner fees paid by the school. However, the Institute found in discussions with Edison staff, former Board members and the school's auditor that while bills eventually got paid, that there were numerous instances over the course of the charter where the bills were paid significantly late. In fact, instances were cited where vendors would not ship materials to the school because the management company was not current with the vendors. Another cause of delay in payments has been the school itself not forwarding invoices to the management partner on a timely basis.

Under the management contract all revenues (excepting "Board funds") are paid to the management partner. Edison pays the school's expenses in accordance with the Board's adopted budget. Any funds not spent become Edison's management fee for that year. Edison bears the risk of any budget overruns. The nature of the school's contract with its management company makes it difficult for the school to accumulate assets. Edison retains any excess of the funds received over expenditures as compensation for the variety of educational and management services provided. Assets which have been purchased through the operating budget are the property of Edison Schools Inc. Upon expiration or termination of the agreement the school will have the option to acquire the assets at net depreciable value. Any assets purchased with Board funds become the property of the school.

The school is committed under a twenty year lease agreement for its facilities (beginning July 1, 2000). Over the first four years of its charter the school received negligible amounts of contributions indicating the school was not dependent on variable income for its financial needs.

The school's financial condition is to a large extent dependent on the financial viability of its management partner and a continuance of the relationship. One point of leverage the school has is that the flow of funds goes first to the school and then to Edison. As a result, there may be time for the school to react should any unforeseen disruption occur with relation to Edison.

Formerly a public company, Edison is the nation's largest private operator of public schools. The company operates both charter and contract schools. Results have been mixed with some successes and also cancelled contracts.

Renewal Question 4
Should the School’s Charter Be Renewed,
What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?

<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Curricular & Assessment Plans</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>The school’s curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable and are likely to improve student learning and achievement.</p> <p>Schools that plan to retain or augment curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have provided evidence that the implementation of that design has resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter.</p> <p>Schools that propose a material redesign to the curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a new charter have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the increased academic performance of children, and a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new curricular design. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Schools that seek to add grade levels not included in the approval of the original charter have presented an outline of the curriculum and specific assessment plans for the term of a future charter. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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Because of the need for Board reorganization and administrative change at the beginning of the fifth year, CSST’s renewal application implicitly concedes that it cannot present evidence that the curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter. Rather, the renewal application argues that the school has taken the necessary steps to correct the school’s shortcomings and that at the beginning of the fifth year it has begun to implement an instructional program that, with more time, would likely lead the school to greater student learning and achievement.

In the absence of hard evidence at the time of renewal, one is left with application explanations for previous shortcomings and plans for improving the academic program, as well as qualitative evidence collected during the renewal visit.

The renewal application identifies a set of circumstances that prevented goal achievement, including: “a lack of focus on individual remediation, an inability to do effective grouping, insufficient documentation and sharing of individual and student cohort academic analysis and modification, not enough use of the proper curricular resources for different kinds of learners, and a serious lack of training for new teachers.” Additional reasons cited are: “a faculty with several inexperienced teachers who lacked effective classroom management skills; a weak student behavior support system; inconsistent disciplinary practices; excessive interruption of instruction; and a climate challenged by unstable leadership and conflicting priorities between the Board, the school management company, and the Principal.” Given the findings in previous Institute

reports, these items represent a valid appraisal of the school's deficiencies during the first four years of its charter.

In response, the school lists concrete steps it has taken to remedy the problems. In addition to establishing a new Board and "hiring an outstanding instructional leader," the actions consist of expanding the support staff for teachers (full-time Curriculum Coordinators and mentors), hiring more qualified teachers, giving parents paid school positions, and inculcating social skills. To the school's credit, each of these steps has been initiated; however, with a few weeks lead time between the development of these plans and actual hiring for the start of the school year, fully developed recruiting, screening, hiring, and training processes could not be implemented. As such, well-qualified personnel are unlikely to have filled most of these positions or been adequately trained by the time of the renewal visit. The Institute interprets these staffing efforts as, at best, reasonable plans for the future, but its impact cannot be determined.

At the time of the renewal visit, besides the staffing efforts, the school was also addressing the program deficiencies identified in the application. As discussed above in the benchmarks associated with academic success, the evidence indicates that the new initiatives have generally had mixed and limited results. Given the size of the school, the recent new staffing, the short time period for implementation of the initiatives, and the continued use of the Edison model, the instructional program at the time of the renewal visit had not improved sufficiently to lead to the conclusion that the school is likely to improve student learning and achievement.

The continued implementation of the plans set forth in the application is reasonable. Since their implementation just began, it cannot be determined if they are feasible or achievable, and if they ultimately would make the school an academic success.

<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Accountability Plan</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school’s measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school’s proposed Accountability Plan follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.</p>
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The Charter School of Science and Technology has submitted a draft Accountability Plan that generally reflects much lower expectations than those called for in the Institute’s Accountability Plan guidelines. In meeting the goals set for the outcome measures in the draft plan, the school would *not* ensure that students overall would be academically prepared to enter into, and graduate from, a rigorous high school program, that the instructional program would have enabled students to make meaningful progress in reducing the gap between their current level of performance and a desired level of success, and that the school was performing better than comparable schools.

The draft plan is not reasonable.

The Institute will, based upon the final renewal recommendation and vote of the State University Trustees, work with CSST to develop a more rigorous set of goals for the outcome measures in its Accountability Plan to be incorporated into a renewal charter.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>School Calendar & Enrollment</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction. Additionally, the school has provided an enrollment plan outlining the grades and growth patterns it anticipates during the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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The Charter School of Science and Technology has provided a sample school calendar in which it proposes to operate on essentially the same schedule as that of schools in the Rochester City School District. While no explanation is given, the calendar is constrained by collective bargaining agreements. In addition, the school proposes to provide a mandatory summer school program for students who do not meet New York State standards and an enriched summer school program for students who do meet the standards.

The school has submitted enrollment plans for a future five-year charter term, in which it would remain at the current grade structure and slightly increase the enrollment to a plateau at which it would then remain throughout the rest of the charter period. Given the challenges the school faces, especially in providing strong and consistent instructional leadership at the House and Academy levels and in filling teaching positions with well-qualified candidates, the continued large size of the school appears to be a serious impediment to future success.

The enrollment plans are not reasonable.

<p>Benchmark 4D Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school’s fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.</p>
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The school faces many challenges to successfully implement its five-year plan for the proposed new charter period. There is no assurance that the plan is achievable. The plan is contingent on the school generating sufficient enrollment demand at the lower grades and reaching a suitable agreement with its management company for the proposed new charter period. In addition, the plan has not addressed capital needs and does not articulate a plan for accumulating sufficient cash reserves to operate under a changed relationship with its management partner. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. These projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. Regardless of the assumptions embedded in the fiscal projections, the school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts.

The school projects revenue increases of three percent, except Title I, and a paid enrollment of 98 percent of target enrollment. Combined these revenue assumptions are reasonable, although there is no guarantee that projected increases in per-pupil aid will materialize. On the expense side, the plan assumes three percent increases, except for higher assumptions for payroll taxes and related benefits (6.59 percent) and utilities (5.5 percent). Overall the plan is sound although it provides no margin for unanticipated expenses or revenue shortfalls. Given the proposed new fee arrangement with its management partner, the school will be responsible to cover any budgetary shortfalls. However, the fiscal plan presented shows only break-even budgets. In other words, the plan does not provide any accumulation of assets by the school. As a result, its fiscal position going forward would likely be precarious.

A significant omission in the plan is capital costs and funding sources. The newly constituted Board is still getting a handle on the capital opportunities and challenges the school faces. Clearly, the Board needs to move expeditiously to clarify its priorities and identify funding sources to realize any planned projects.

According to the renewal application, both the new Board and Edison believe that in order to dispel any doubt about Edison’s primary motivation, the new Board should become responsible for the entire budget, with Edison earning a true management fee for its services. The Board and Edison have taken the first step to implement this change by converting Edison’s management fee to a fixed percentage of gross revenue for FY 2005. The school projects that by no later than the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2005, the Board will assume entire responsibility for the budget. It is anticipated that, the Edison management contract will contain a base management fee, with the ability to earn incentive compensation based on student achievement. The contract will purportedly contain penalty and/or termination provisions in the event minimum levels of student achievement are not attained.

The new Board has committed to pursuing effective implementation of the Edison School model. That commitment should provide direction and support going forward. However, despite successes achieved by Edison Schools Inc., there is currently no record of such successes in New York State. Institute-chartered schools partnered with Edison have consistently had a checkered record of timely financial reporting. For the school to successfully continue operations, it is clear that both the Board and Edison need to make some improvements.