



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

New Covenant Charter School
Third Year Site Visit Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The third year site visit is part of a comprehensive accountability system for New York State charter schools sponsored by the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute. The site visit during the school's third year of operation provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward its academic and organizational goals as defined in its accountability plan.

The third year site visit complements the yearly reviews conducted by CSI staff and corroborates the school's own annual reports of progress toward the targets it defined in its accountability plan. The visit provides an independent assessment of the school's progress and provides recommendations to the school as it prepares to apply for charter renewal in its fifth year of operation. The recommendations represent the experienced opinions of the inspection team and are intended to offer the school guidance for enhancing the evidence base for its renewal application.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The third year site visit to New Covenant Charter School was conducted on June 3-4, 2002 by an independent team of experienced educators contracted by SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

Dr. Karen Laba, Managing Partner, SchoolWorks

Ledyard McFadden, President, SchoolWorks

Nick Feldman, retired public school principal, SchoolWorks evaluation panelist

Anthony Pope, former alternative school administrator, teacher, doctoral student, Harvard Graduate School of Education, SchoolWorks evaluation panelist and writer

On June 4, Susan Miller Barker, representing the Charter Schools Institute, visited the school to monitor the process and assure that the protocol was being implemented as planned and that it was serving the needs for which it was designed.

The team used the school's accountability plan goals as the guide for their examination along with the set of framework questions included in the site visit protocol to assess the school's academic and organizational effectiveness. Prior to the one and a half day visit, the team reviewed the school's documents including its annual Accountability Plan Progress Report, its original charter application, and reports from previous informal site visits by the Charter Schools Institute. At the school, the team interviewed school administrators, educational management personnel, staff, parents, students, and visited classes to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals. The team offered a brief oral summary

of its findings and recommendations to the school leader and invited her to ask for clarification as needed.

This report is organized into two parts. *Part I: School Progress Report*, offers the team's judgments about the school's effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the charter school law (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

- ? improving student learning and achievement;
- ? increasing learning opportunities for all students (particularly students at risk of academic failure);
- ? encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- ? creating new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- ? expanding parental choice in public schools; and
- ? moving from a rule-based to performance-based accountability system by holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

The judgments of the team are organized into the same three categories as the school's other documents: academic program, organizational viability, and unique programmatic areas. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in **Appendix A**.

The second part of the report, *School Accountability Plan: Assessment and Recommendations*, reports the team's assessment of the quality of the school's own measures of its progress, and offers suggestions for enhancing the evidence base on which renewal decisions will be made at the school's fifth year of operation. A brief rationale for the inspection team's recommendations is presented in narrative form along with a summary table in **Appendix B**.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The New Covenant Charter School (NCCS) was established in 1999 and opened for 398 students in grades K-5. The school's goal is to produce continuous academic gains in student performance while serving the individual and diverse needs of its student population by providing a culture of mutual respect, core values, and a quality learning environment for both students and teachers. Once located in temporary modular facilities, NCCS moved into a new building in September 2001 that houses both the school and a neighborhood community center. The school is now in its third year of operation and enrolls 711 students in grades K-7. NCCS initiated a partnership agreement with Edison Schools, Inc, prior to the 2000-2001 school year following the school's separation from its original management organization. Edison provides many of the school's curriculum materials as well as teacher training opportunities.

Organizationally, the school is divided into three academies – Primary (K-2), Elementary (3-5), and Junior (6-8). The school is led by a Principal assisted by the heads of the primary and junior academies. The Board of Directors described its role as being actively engaged in overseeing operations of the school's educational program and monitoring the performance of the management company.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The results of state and local assessments indicate that New Covenant Charter School students are not reaching academic achievement targets defined in the school's Accountability Plan. In addition, student scores are well below state averages. Data from standardized tests administered in the school's early years is incomplete, and insufficient to allow accurate assessment of student progress at this time. According to information gathered during the inspection visit, the school appears to be providing for diverse student needs through its curriculum design and its special education program. The team visited twelve of the over 30 classrooms at New Covenant, an insufficient sample on which to base generalizations about the quality of curriculum implementation.

? To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?

The New Covenant Charter School (NCCS) has not met all targets outlined in its accountability plan. The school has made gains on some academic assessments including improvement in reading as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment from fall to spring within each year. In the school's 2000 Accountability Plan Progress Report, student scores are reported in grade level equivalents, and the school measures its progress by demonstrating growth in percentage of students at different grade level performance standards. From this report, there appears to be moderate progress within a school year on reading achievement.

New Covenant Charter School is far from meeting its target of 75% of students performing at or above Level 3 on the *NYS Elementary English and Language Arts Assessment*.

NYS Grade 4 ELA,

Level	1	2	3	4
2001 NCCS	42%	35%	22%	0%
2000 NCCS	51%	38%	10%	0%

NYS Grade 4 Math,

Level	1	2	3	4
2000 Test NCCS	61%	36%	3%	0%
2001 Test NCCS	32.6%	45.7%	17.4%	4.3%

As measured by the New York State tests, the fourth graders at NCCS perform well below the stated target of "75% of students performing at Level 3 or above." NCCS students scoring in the Level 3 and above category on the 2000 administration of the *NYS English Language Arts Assessment* was 9% and 22.2% for the 2001 administration of the test. Three percent of NCCS Students scored at Level 3 and above on the *NYS Elementary Mathematics Assessment* in 2000, increasing to 21.7% at that level on the 2001 administration of the test.

NCCS's fourth grade mean scores on the NYS test in ELA and Math are below the average of schools in the Albany district, which NCCS identifies as 'similar schools'.

NYS Assessments, Students Scoring At or Above Level 3

		NCCS	Sim Sch 1	Sim Schl 2	Sim Schl 3
ELA	2001	22.2	23.3	21.2	42.0
	2000	9	26	17	30
Math	2001	21.7	44.3	36.1	43.0
	2000	3	29	51	45

From its first year of testing, fourth graders at NCCS have performed below students in ‘similar schools.’ The most recent group of fourth graders has moved closer to comparing favorably with some of the similar schools in English Language Arts, but still lag well behind the performance of other students in the area in mathematics.

Currently there is no student performance data available for the content areas of science and social studies.

- ? What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?

On the *New York State Elementary English Language Arts Assessments*, the most recent group of NCCS fourth graders scored better than their predecessors in the fourth grade class of 2000 as noted in the charts above.

On the Gates MacGinitie reading assessment, the average NCE* score for NCCS second graders improved from 25.5 in fall 2000 to 33.5 in spring 2001. Third graders improved from a NCE score of 28.2 to 34.5 over the same school year. Fourth graders improved from 25.1 to 33.5 and fifth graders improved from 25.9 to 34.2.

While improvement within the school year is evident as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment, a comprehensive analysis of student progress over time was not possible due to incomplete data sets from the Stanford 9 and the Terra Nova standardized tests. NCCS leaders and their Edison consultants were unable to locate a full set of student performance scores from the first year of the school’s operation under another management company. While on site, administrators were able to identify scores for some assessments from the first years, but not a complete report. The school was advised to continue its efforts to locate the full data set, and to report the limited information available in its *Accountability Progress Report*, showing particularly the trends over time for continuing students.

- ? Does the school’s instructional program meet diverse students’ needs?

The instructional program at NCCS appears to be addressing diverse student needs. Interviews and classroom observations reveal a range of skill among teachers in diversifying instruction in

* Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) is a standard score (a score that is expressed as a deviation from a population mean) with the lowest score being 1, the highest being 99 and the mean (arithmetical average) of 50. NCE’s may be added, subtracted and averaged and may be used to represent how a student or group of students performed in comparison to the mean. For example, a drop in scores over time means the students are being passed by their peers nationwide and an increase in scores over time means that students are passing their peers nationwide.

heterogeneous classes. In the middle grades, teachers demonstrate various strategies for mathematics instruction, and teachers use instructional and assessment modifications for students with Individual Educational Plans. Frequent regrouping is an integral part of the Success For All (SFA) reading program, allowing teachers to design instruction focused on a moderate range of student abilities. To further provide for the needs of students, teachers offer individual tutoring to students during the school day.

? Do the school's standards reflect implementation of high academic expectations?

While the written curriculum standards are based on national standards and presumed to be of high quality, the review team was not able to visit a sufficient sample of classrooms to assess thoroughly the level of implementation of the school's curriculum standards.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

The conditions for successfully meeting the organizational needs of New Covenant Charter School appear to be in place, but much work remains in developing systems to collect and track student achievement data. While enrollment continues to grow and parents report they are generally satisfied with the work of the school, they indicated their continuing support will rely on the success of the school in improving student performance to the level promised in the school's documents. Coordinated efforts to apply organizational energy to accurately assessing student needs and allocating sufficient resources to address weaknesses will be an important factor in the school's success.

? Is enrollment stable and sufficient to provide the financial foundation for the school?

Enrollment appears to be stable and sufficient to provide the financial foundation for the school. While occupying temporary space, the school's enrollment was capped by facilities constraints. Since moving into the new building, enrollment at NCCS has doubled and is now in line with targets defined in the original charter. Currently there is a waiting list for students to enroll in the lower grades. Although enrollment this year is slightly below budget projections, the school is expecting another increase in enrollment for the 2002-2003 academic year.

? Does the school's financial management serve the needs of the students?

Generally, the school's financial management appears to serve the needs of the students. Classrooms appeared to be suitably provisioned with classroom materials and resources. Parent concerns about library and technology materials promised by the management company in earlier years have been satisfied according to participants in the parent focus group. The school is also in the process of analyzing the delivery of special services to the full extent necessary to meet the needs of the all NCCS students. The *Accountability Progress Report* reviewed by the team was not compiled with the most recent June 2001 budget. The team did not have the appropriate time during the inspection to conduct a thorough review of the current budget and assess its allocation of resources for school needs.

? Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

Students and parents are generally satisfied with the work of NCCS. Data from the Harris Survey indicates that the school has met its satisfaction targets for parents and students as identified in the school's accountability plan. Parents expressed in interviews that they are strongly supportive of the school, and uniformly positive about the dedication of the staff and the quality of the principal. Parents in the focus group had mixed evaluation of the NCCS School Board and the school's partnership with Edison. They expressed restrained approval for the support of Edison, and mentioned several times their close monitoring of services to their children as the primary criterion for full support of both Edison and the Board.

? Are systems in place to promote the efficient operation of school functions?

Some systems at NCCS are in place to promote the efficient operation of school functions. The school is making student program decisions based on the achievement information they currently gather including the incomplete set of Stanford 9 results and reading assessments from the Success For All (SFA) program, but the extent and quality of current data systems is insufficient and incomplete. Previous year's student performance data has been misplaced, and the school recognizes that a system to collect and secure current and future student achievement data is needed. The school also lacks an efficient system for tracking student cohorts as defined in the school's accountability plan.

The management company for New Covenant, Edison Schools has implemented business management systems that allow frequent and regular oversight of expenses which are reported monthly to the Board of Trustees. Coordination of professional development linked to delivery of the Edison curriculum is carried out under the guidance of an Edison liaison. Edison is also responsible for systems to assure technology integration into the academic program. After facing some early strains, parents reported that the technology promises are being more effectively fulfilled in recent months than in the early stages of Edison's management.

? Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and modify as needed?

NCCS does appear to have systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of its academic program. Various systems exist, which involve lead teachers, coordinators, academy directors, and consultants, to provide frequent supervision and monitoring of both curriculum and instructional development. Lead teachers at each grade level serve as mentors for new teachers as well as liaisons with the administrators. Several new teachers described their heavy reliance on the lead teacher, particularly in the early months of their employment, and particularly if they were hired after the summer professional development had been completed. Edison relies on its summer meetings to orient teachers to SFA and the Edison Benchmarks systems (an comprehensive standardized internal assessment linked to the Edison curriculum standards), as well as to provide instruction in the mathematics, science and history curricula. Subject area coordinators articulated in interviews that benchmarks, SFA, and standardized test results are used collaboratively to inform instruction. According to interviews with Edison personnel and

NCCS staff, the school is currently adapting academic programs to meet the needs identified in student performance results to the extent they have data available.

The principal and academy directors share duties for evaluating teachers. In addition to the Edison evaluation criteria, a teacher portfolio system has been put into place to provide supplemental information about teacher activities.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

New Covenant Charter School's core mission is described by various stakeholder groups in slightly different ways. The unique programmatic areas identified for New Covenant in its accountability plan address the learning environment, parent involvement and learning community. These aspects appear to be in the early stages of development. While the focus on an improved learning environment is evident, data for analyzing high levels of family involvement is lacking and creating a true 'learning environment' is not clearly defined.

? Is the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

All stakeholders did not consistently communicate the school's mission and vision in the same way. There were several iterations, but no common themes were articulated. Several phrases were repeated, such as, "kids come first," "parents have a choice," "sense of community," "focus on academics," but none were repeated consistently. Overall, there appears to be a common commitment to children and their success, with variations in the ways that success will best be achieved.

? (*NCCS Unique Programmatic Goal 1*) "develop an improved learning environment by scoring proficient on the May Institute student management criteria"

Some special programs are meeting expected targets as defined in the school's accountability plan. The school's target of improving the learning environment by focusing on core values is being addressed in several ways. Classroom rules and the Edison core values are posted throughout the school, the school has a documented code of conduct, and a core values curriculum is used in some classrooms. The school has also implemented a behavior modification incentive program, Found Being Impressive (F.B.I) to reinforce a positive school environment for students. During the visit, the site team noted generally positive behavior in classrooms as well as in common spaces.

? (*NCCS Unique Programmatic Goal 2*) "families will demonstrate a high level of involvement"

Records of parent involvement were not reported in the *2001 Accountability Progress Report*. The inspection team had limited information to report knowledgeably regarding this target focusing on high levels of family involvement (see *Recommendations* in Part II of this report.)

? (NCCS Unique Programmatic Goal 3) “develop a true learning community”

Teacher participation in required professional development activities is listed as the measure for this goal. However, the school has added staff over the course of the year, with later arriving teachers limited in their opportunity to participate in ‘required’ professional development events. Teacher satisfaction as reported on the Harris Survey was not available for review, so the team could not assess the school’s progress toward a positive professional climate as implied in this goal and queried in the Harris Survey. As noted in the recommendations, more precise definition of the meaning of “true learning community” will help the school report its progress clearly and thoroughly in order for the Charter Schools Institute (CSI) to evaluate its performance.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The school accountability plan for New Covenant Charter School has changed at least twice over the course of its involvement with Edison Schools. The goals and measures have been compiled by Edison staff and brought to New Covenant administrators and Board for feedback and revision. Monitoring progress toward the goals is a joint responsibility of Edison and NCCS personnel. The recommendations below represent the opinions of the experienced evaluators on the inspection team and are based on the most recent Accountability Plan version available to the team. An oral presentation of these recommendations was made to the principal before the team left the school at the end of its visit. A summary of the recommendations is listed in table form as **APPENDIX B**.

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS

(goals and measures are quoted from the NCCS Accountability Plan)

Goal 1 All students at the New Covenant Charter School will become proficient readers.

Proposed measures:

(1): By the conclusion of the first charter period, 75% of the students (who have been at the charter school for at least two years) will perform at level 3 or above on the *NYS Elementary English Language Arts Assessment*.

(2): Students in grades two and above will demonstrate improvement in reading, as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment as evidenced by an average yearly increase of 3 NCE when comparing fall to spring mean scores.

(3): The yearly increase in the mean performance of 4th and 8th grade NCCS students on the *NYS English Language Arts Assessment* will exceed mean score increases of students in similar schools in the Albany City School District (Arbor Hill, Philip Schuyler, and Giffen schools).

(4a): Effective 2002-2003 school year - Student cohorts in grades two and above will demonstrate average annual progress of at least 3 NCE’s per year as measured by mean scores on the Terra Nova (reading subtest). All non-exempt students will participate.

(4b) Effective 1999-2000 school year – 2001 – 2002 school year – Student performance on the Stanford-9 achievement test will demonstrate average annual school-wide gains of at least 3 NCE’s per year for students in grades two and above.

Goal 2: All students at the New Covenant Charter School will be proficient in mathematics.

Proposed measures:

(1) By the conclusion of the first charter period, 75% of the students (who have been at the charter school for at least two years) will perform at level 3 or above on the *NYS Elementary Mathematics Assessment*.

(2) The yearly increase in the mean performance of 4th and 8th grade NCCS students on the *NYS Elementary Mathematics Assessment* will exceed mean score increases of students in similar schools in the Albany City School District (Arbor Hill, Philip Schuyler, and Giffen schools).

(3) Effective 2002-2003 school year - Student cohorts in grades two and above will demonstrate average annual progress of at least 3 NCE's per year as measured by mean scores on the Terra Nova (math subtest). All non-exempt students will participate.

(4) Effective 1999-2000 school year – 2001 – 2002 school year – Student performance on the Stanford-9 achievement test will demonstrate average annual school-wide gains of at least 3 NCE's per year for students in grades two and above.

Goal 3: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate their writing proficiency each year.

Proposed measures:

(1) By the conclusion of the first charter period, 75% of the students (who have been at the charter school for at least two years) will perform at level 3 or above on the *NYS Elementary English Language Arts Assessment*.

(2) The yearly increase in the mean performance of 4th and 8th grade NCCS students on the *NYS Elementary English Language Arts Assessment* will exceed mean score increases of students in similar schools in the Albany City School District (Arbor Hill, Philip Schuyler, and Giffen schools).

Goal 4: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate proficiency in the area of science.

Proposed measures:

(1) By the conclusion of the first charter period, 60% of the students (who have been at the charter school for at least two years) will perform at level 3 or above on the *NYS Elementary Science Assessment*.

Goal 5: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate proficiency in the area of social studies.

Proposed measures:

(1) By the conclusion of the first charter period, 60% of the students (who have been at the charter school for at least two years) will perform at level 3 or above on the *NYS Elementary Social Studies Assessment*.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS -- RECOMMENDATIONS

1. According to school personnel, the school is making a transition from the Gates MacGinitie reading assessment to the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). If this change occurs it is

recommended that the school consider explaining the change of assessment tools in their *Accountability Progress Report*, and, if possible, summarize the compatibility between the Gates and the SRI. A change in assessment tool at this stage of the school's first charter term will limit the ability of the CSI to assess the progress of NCCS students over time in reading.

2. With the advice of Edison, NCCS is also undertaking a transition to the Terra Nova standardized assessment to replace the Stanford 9. For the reasons cited above, NCCS school leaders are advised to consider continuing to use the Stanford 9 with the founding cohort through the end of the charter term to maintain an accurate longitudinal record of student progress over time. Maintaining records of various cohorts of students requires skillful use of data collection and management tools.
3. New Covenant relies heavily on student performance on the New York State assessments as evidence of its progress. However, the NYS tests are not given at every grade, every year or for every subject area. The school's record of performance would be enhanced if intermediate assessments were available to measure the targets it has set, namely 'all' students will achieve proficiency in reading, mathematics, writing, science and social studies. The use of only the NYS assessments will not yield a comprehensive database of performance information on which the school can report progress to its community or to the CSI.
4. It will be important for NCCS to clearly define "two years at NCCS." For instance, some NYS assessments are administered in fall of the school year. Will students starting their second year at NCCS be included as part of the "two years" cohort? Will students taking state tests in January or February be counted as having completed their "two years"? There is a concern about how many students will have attended NCCS for two years when the NYS Assessments for eighth graders is administered during the 2002-2003 school year. Once the school clarifies their meaning of 'two years' at NCCS, it will be important to maintain accurate records of students meeting the school's two-year attendance criteria.
5. It will be useful for NCCS to confirm the number of returning students (cohort groups) and to include whole school, class, and cohort scores from their accountability plan on their *Accountability Progress Report*. Currently NCCS has 96 students in third grade, of whom approximately 42 have been at the school since its opening. Performance for both groups of students, whole class and two year continuing, can be evaluated by the Charter Schools Institute to determine if the school is approaching its performance targets.
6. New federal regulations will eventually require the school to disaggregate the school's performance results and report student achievement by relevant subgroups (special education designation, poverty, language dominance, etc.) The school might consider preparing for these new requirements by sorting and reporting its current information across all relevant categories.
7. It would be helpful for NCCS to explain to reviewers its rationale for the selection of the 'similar schools' listed in its accountability plan. New York State has a system for classifying schools across several indices, and New Covenant leaders can prepare for

reviewers' questions by explaining their selection criteria if they are different from those of the state.

8. When making comparisons to similar schools, to insure valid comparisons, NCCS may want to consult a testing specialist to evaluate the validity of using *rate of increase* between schools with different proficiency levels. Percentage of increase or average mean improvement varies by baseline measure, with groups of students in lower stanines expected to make stronger gains, based on scaled scores, than students in upper stanines. Comparing gains when baseline scores were significantly different may not be a valid comparison.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS

Goal 1: Based on annual satisfaction survey data, New Covenant Charter School will report high levels of satisfaction for parents, faculty and students.

Proposed measures:

- (1) New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate high levels of satisfaction (as defined by a mean "overall satisfaction rating" of 7.5 or higher) on the Harris interactive survey of parents, teachers and students.

Goal 2: New Covenant Charter School will responsibly manage its financial resources.

Proposed measures:

- (1) New Covenant Charter School will use sound financial management, and adequate financial controls and policies to effectively oversee public funds. Evidence of sound financial management will be reflected in an annual audit, actual and proposed budgets for each completed and upcoming fiscal year, as well as by a yearly balance sheet.

Goal 3: New Covenant Charter School will limit the number of families choosing to leave the school, thus decreasing learning disruptions common in like schools with historically high mobility rates. Measures will not consider families who have relocated outside of the city of Albany.

Proposed measures:

- (1) 80% of the students who started at the school in September will remain until the end of the school year.
- (2) 80% of the student population will choose to remain for the subsequent school year.

ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS -- RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The site visit team recommends that NCCS include the history of the Harris survey results for each group in their *2002 Accountability Plan Progress Report*. In addition to reporting the percentage rating as described in the plan, the school could enhance its presentation of its performance by providing a more detailed discussion of strengths and areas needing improvement as revealed by the survey.

2. The NCCS *Accountability Progress Report* would be more informative if it included the number of surveys distributed, the number returned and the percentage of the population represented by the responses. These details allow a reader to determine if the survey results reflect a sample of responses large enough to allow generalizations that would be valid for the whole school.
3. NCCS leaders can enrich their *Accountability Progress Report* by citing the results of the Harris survey of teachers and students in enough detail to allow reviewers to understand the range of responses by different stakeholders.
4. A thorough analysis of enrollment trends would be improved by gathering and reporting the reasons for student withdrawal, both during the year and between years. The school declares that it intends to use this measure as evidence of its success in contrast to high mobility within district schools, and describing reasons for student departure in detail can help the school as well as outside reviewers understand its progress toward its 80% retention goal.
5. In its financial goals, NCCS declares that it will “responsibly manage” school funds. More precise definition of ‘responsibly’ would remove possible alternative criteria for this term. For instance, since all schools are required by law to conduct an official audit, this goal does not distinguish NCCS from any other district or charter school. However, the school could choose to define ‘responsibly’ to mean the percentage of total budget allocated to instructional materials or professional development, setting a realistic target for each successive budget year. Linking budget allocations to school and student needs is particularly powerful demonstration of responsible financial management. .

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS

Goal 1: Through the use of New Covenant Charter School’s character education program, an intentional focus on core values, and analysis of the learning environment by the May Institute, there will be observable improvement in the learning environment.

Proposed measures:

- (1) By the conclusion of the third year of operation, the school will regularly exhibit proficient levels of performance related to student management as defined in the student management guidelines, including all essential elements. Independent experts will be invited to assess this measure.

Goal 2: The families of students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate a high level of involvement in and support of their child’s educational program.

Proposed measures:

- (1) 80% of all families will participate in Quarterly Learning Conferences, a process which involves students, their parents and teachers in quarterly assessment of progress as measured against well articulated standards and results in individualized quarterly goal setting. As a part of the QLC process students will develop portfolios that exemplify progress in student work.

Goal 3: The staff at New Covenant Charter School will create a true learning community.

Proposed measures:

(1) 100% of the teachers at New Covenant Charter School will participate in required professional development as they move forward to create a true learning community.

UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS -- RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In defining the NCCS goal of “improving the learning environment,” the school can help evaluators and other readers by identifying the ‘independent experts’ mentioned in the accountability plan, how the assessment of the environment will be conducted, when and how often the assessment will occur, and what measures will be considered reliable.

2. Reporting changes in the levels of effective student management will show growth over time and provide useful information to the readers of the school’s yearly *Accountability Progress Report*.

3. In addition to reporting parent’s attendance at report card conferences, the school could enrich the evidence base for parent contribution by reporting the hours parents volunteer at the school, attendance at other school events and functions, and community connections between the school and area businesses and agencies. Many schools with an interest in improving parent involvement find that parent organizations are helpful in developing a system to maintain accurate records of parent participation.

4. It would help readers and evaluators if NCCS would clearly define what they mean by “true learning community” as used in its accountability plan, and explain how participation in professional development can serve as an indicator for this goal. Participation in ‘required’ professional development is a questionable measure of a positive professional climate. In some accountability systems, teacher turnover and teacher survey summaries are additional indicators to measure the commitment of the professional faculty to the school. However, without a clearer definition and list of measurable indicators, it will be difficult for the Charter Schools Institute to assess whether NCCS has met this goal.

CONCLUSION: As it moves toward renewal in its fifth year, New Covenant Charter School is working toward implementing the Edison curriculum, and recent changes in facilities and leadership have brought stability to the school. An effective system for collecting and securing student performance data and for using student achievement results to guide program decisions will be a valuable step forward for NCCS. Clarifying some elements of the NCCS accountability plan will help both the school and community measure progress toward its ambitious achievement targets. Enrollment is solid, and parents are generally satisfied with the school. The school recognizes that much work remains in improving student performance to meet locally defined targets, which will be a critical issue as the school moves toward renewal.

APPENDIX A: Framework for the Analysis of School Progress

Category	Criteria	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	Does the school's instructional program meet diverse students' needs?	Class visits, interviews, data review, Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Do the school's standards reflect implementation of high academic expectations?	Review of curriculum documents; confirmation of implementation by class visits
Organizational viability	Is enrollment stable and sufficient to provide the financial foundation for the school?	School documents Enrollment history
	Does the school's financial management serve the needs of the students?	Budget review, audit reports
	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey review
	Are systems in place to promote the efficient operation of school functions?	Interviews, observations Staffing history
	Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and modify as needed?	Personnel evaluation policies, minutes and agendas of board, staff meetings
Unique Aspects	Is the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?	Interviews, document reviews
	Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?	Accountability Plan, Progress Reports, other docs unique to each school

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COVENANT CHARTER SCHOOL

I. Academic Program Goals

Goal 1: All students at the New Covenant Charter School will become proficient readers.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 75% at NCCS >2 years will perform at or above level 3 on the NYS ELA --within-year increase of 3 NCE points on Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment, grade 2+ -- average increase in mean performance of NCCS grade 4 and 8 students on NYS Assessment will exceed similar schools in Albany City School District --average annual increase of 3 NCE points on Terra Nova reading, students grade 2+ (2002-2003) -- average annual school wide gain of 3 NCE points on Stanford 9 for students grades 2+ (1999-2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- maintaining accurate records of students meeting the 2 year attendance criteria --if the school changes to SRI from Gates (as mentioned during the visit) explaining change and provide evidence of compatibility for tracking long term change --defining intermediate benchmarks on a yearly, or monthly basis for performance in ELA to demonstrate performance by “all” students as noted in the goal --consulting with assessment specialist to confirm the validity of measures of ‘average increases’ for comparative purposes -- calculating and report ‘baseline’ measures of performance of all students -- continuing with the Stanford 9 at least for the founding cohort through the end of the charter term
Goal 2: All students at the New Covenant Charter School will be proficient in mathematics.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 75% at NCCS >2 years will perform at or above level 3 on the NYS math -- average increase in mean performance of NCCS grade 4 and 8 students on NYS Assessment will exceed similar schools in Albany City School District --average annual increase of 3 NCE points on Terra Nova math, students grade 2+ (2002-2003) -- average annual school wide gain of 3 NCE points on Stanford 9 for students grades 2+ (1999-2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (In addition to Recommendations for Goal 1) -- explaining the rationale for selecting designated ‘similar school’ and explain differences between NCCS definition and NYS classification of ‘similar schools’ -- defining precisely “two years at NCCS” (see Recommendations details in the report) -- disaggregating and reporting student performance by relevant student subgroups (special education designation, language needs, poverty, etc.) -- including the performance of all students as well as continuing students on annual progress reports.
Goal 3: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate their writing proficiency each year.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 75% at NCCS >2 years will perform at or above level 3 on the NYS ELA -- average increase in mean performance of NCCS grade 4 and 8 students on NYS Assessment will exceed similar schools in Albany City School District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (In addition to recommendations for Goals 1 and 2) -- providing yearly measure for all students, all grades
Goal 4: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate proficiency in the area of science.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 60% at NCCS > 2 yrs will perform at or above level 3 on NYS Science assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (In addition to recommendations for Goals 1, 2 and 3) -- providing a yearly measure for all students, all grades
Goal 5: Students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate proficiency in the area of social studies.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 60% at NCCS > 2 yrs will perform at or above level 3 on NYS social studies assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (In addition to recommendations for Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4) -- providing a yearly measure for all students, all grades

II. Organizational Viability Goals

Goal 1: Based on annual satisfaction data, New Covenant Charter School will report high levels of satisfaction for parents, faculty and students.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- overall rating 7.5+ on Harris interactive survey of parents, teachers, and students	--including a history of results from the Harris survey for each stakeholder group on the 2002 Progress report --disaggregating the survey results to describe the school's strengths and areas for improvement in more detail --listing the number (and percentage) of respondents in each stakeholder group, date of survey administration, discussion of the school's interpretation and response to survey findings
Goal 2: New Covenant Charter School will responsibly manage its financial resources.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
--annual audit -- yearly balance sheets --review of actual and proposed budgets	(In addition to the recommendations for Goal 1) -- clearly defining "responsibly manage" in terms of the linkage between budget allocations and student/ school needs
Goal 3: New Covenant Charter School will limit the number of families choosing to leave the school, thus decreasing learning disruptions common in like schools with historically high mobility rates. Measures will not consider families who have relocated outside of the city of Albany. .	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 80% students remain Sept. through June -- 80% students continue to subsequent year	(In addition to the recommendations for Goals 1 and 2) -- documenting and reporting reasons for student withdrawal both during and between years

III. Unique Programmatic Area Goals

Goal 1: Through the use of the New Covenant Charter School's character education program, an intentional focus on core values, and analysis of the learning environment by the May Institute, there will be observable improvement in the learning environment.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 'proficient' levels of performance on student management guidelines (May Institute), scored by independent experts	-- specifying the 'independent experts', the tool to be used, reliability of results, when and how the observations will be conducted -- clearly linking the score of 'proficient' with other measures of school climate (e.g., teacher turnover, student withdrawal, number of complaints received by the Board of Trustees, etc.)
Goal 2: The families of students at New Covenant Charter School will demonstrate high level of involvement in and support of their child's educational program.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 80% families participate in QLC conferences	(In addition to the recommendations for Goal 1) -- describing the system to track and maintain these records --complementing this measure with additional information about number of volunteer hours, percentage of families contributing to school events, attendance rosters for school functions, etc.
Goal 3: The staff at New Covenant Charter School will create a true learning community.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 100% teachers participate in required professional development	(In addition to the recommendations for Goals 1 & 2) -- clearly defining 'true learning community' and list observable indicators for this target; gather and report information in progress report -- provid ing evidence from sources other than 'required' events to confirm progress toward this goal