

# Accountability Plan Progress Reports for the 2005-06 School Year

## Reader's Guide

### *SUNY Authorized Charter Schools and Accountability*

As set forth in the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees*, the single most important factor that the Charter Schools Institute and the State University Board of Trustees consider in making renewal determinations is the school's record in generating successful student achievement outcomes. In order to determine whether a school has met that high standard, **each charter school that the State University Board of Trustees authorizes is required to enter into an accountability agreement, known as the Accountability Plan**, which ultimately becomes part of its charter.

**The Charter Schools Institute closely monitors each school's progress toward achieving the goals outlined in its Accountability Plan.**

In addition, as part of their annual reporting requirements **all SUNY authorized charter schools must submit an Accountability Plan Progress Report which, from their vantage point, addresses each of the goals and outcome measures contained in their Accountability Plans**. The information presented in these Progress Reports constitutes important evidence that a school is keeping its promises to its students, parents and community, and is critical to making its case for renewal at the end of its charter period. The most important parts of Progress Reports are student achievement results on state exams and other assessments. However, not all schools will have tested grade levels for a particular exam. Each year the state administers ELA and math tests to grades 3-8, science tests to grades 4 and 8, and social studies tests to grades 5 and 8.

Important Note: **The Accountability Plan Progress Report is authored by the charter school.** In reporting school progress toward meeting the outcome measures set forth in the Accountability Plan, schools are encouraged to build a case for the effectiveness of their program and to lay the groundwork for writing a Renewal Application and ultimately for charter renewal. **The school's evaluation of its own progress does not necessarily reflect the conclusions of the Institute.** Further, the Institute does not affirm the completeness or accuracy of the report's data and may not endorse the school's characterization of the progress it has made toward achieving its Accountability Plan goals. Throughout the life of the school's charter, the Institute will visit each school, generating Institute School Visit Reports, and at the end of each charter period, a Renewal Report (select the <back> button in your browser to return to the school profile to see any/all available reports). These reports include detailed summaries of the Institute's observations of the school, as well as its evaluation of student performance and progress toward meeting the academic subject goals in its Accountability Plan.

## Section IV: Harlem Link Charter School

### ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN PROGRESS REPORT 2005-2006

#### ***Major Goal: English Language Arts***

**Goal:** Students will become proficient readers and writers of the English Language.

#### **Measures**

##### *Absolute*

Each year, 75 percent of third through fourth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) examination.

Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State ELA exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.

##### *Comparative*

Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State ELA exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district.

Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State ELA exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to small degree) according to a regression analysis, performed by the Charter Schools Institute, controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.

##### *Value Added*

For the 2008-09 school year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State ELA exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State ELA exam.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Findings**

*Method:* Harlem Link does not have any children eligible to take the State ELA examination.

#### **Additional Measures**

The school employed a variety of assessments to determine students' progress in English Language Arts. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Brigance assessment are discussed below.

#### **Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)**

- a. *Method:* The assessment was administered three times: in November and March (first grade only) and June (both grades). Students were removed from their classes to have the DRA administered one-to-one. The assessment involves students reading to a teacher at increasingly difficult levels, attempting to recount the story accurately until the child's reading level (based on fluency and

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<sup>1</sup> If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.

comprehension) is determined. In most cases, classroom teachers administered the DRA to their own students. On some occasions, Harlem Link's Title I-funded Reading Specialist administered the assessment for new students who entered during the school year. In all cases, teachers scored the assessment based on the rubric included in the assessment packet.

- b. *Results:* By the June testing, 80.8% of the kindergarteners were reading successfully at or above the benchmark level (Level B, according the Fountas and Pinnell system). 74.0% of first graders had met the standard for the Level H benchmark in Grade 1. The charts below summarize the year-end results, as well as the progress made schoolwide from one administration of the test.

<b>Year End Summary</b>			
Percent of students....	Kindergarten	1st Gr.	Total
Below grade level benchmark	19.2%	32.7%	26.0%
At benchmark	13.5%	11.5%	12.5%
Ahead of benchmark	67.3%	55.8%	61.5%

<b>Schoolwide Progress</b>			
Percent of students....	Nov 2005	Mar 2006	Jun 2006
Below grade level benchmark	48.0%	37.7%	26.0%
At benchmark	10.0%	7.5%	12.5%
Ahead of benchmark	42.0%	54.7%	61.5%
Total at benchmark or ahead	52.0%	62.2%	74.0%

- c. *Evaluation:* The DRA gives the school great evidence that progress has been made toward achieving the goal. It is currently the premier assessment used by teachers to determine reading level; its results carried great weight, for example, in determining whether students had met Harlem Link's literacy standards and could be promoted to the next grade. Since the assessment tests fluency and comprehension, it is a helpful though not a complete predictor of performance on the state ELA exam. Teachers used the first two DRA administrations to determine homogeneous reading groups for classroom instruction, and on balance saw steady progress. We are particularly encouraged by the jump of over ten percentage points in the number of students schoolwide who meet the benchmark at each administration.
- d. *Further evidence:* Because the assessment was chosen by teachers for its usefulness in assessing individual students' reading rate and need, there was no need to disaggregate the data along NCLB guidelines. (There is clearly also no previous data, as this year is Harlem Link's first.) However, a useful distinction within the data is the difference between the two first grade classes:

<b>Percent of Students At or Above Grade Benchmark</b>			
	Nov 2005	Mar 2006	Jun 2006
...in First Grade Room A	72.0%	70.4%	61.5%
...in First Grade Room B	32.0%	53.8%	73.1%

As can be seen from the chart, one first grade class soared, surpassing the other in percentage of students at or above the grade level benchmark. The other class stagnated and in fact dropped in performance. Throughout the year, classroom observations indicated that it was Classroom B that showed a consistent approach to properly implementing Harlem Link's curricular vision. Harlem Link is using this data in setting out curricular guidelines and priorities for the coming school year; clearly, best practices from Classroom B should be disseminated and enforced schoolwide.

### **Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills (CIBS)**

- a. *Method:* In August 2006, Harlem Link brought every child in to the school for a one-on-one administration of the assessment. Teachers were trained on administering and scoring the Brigance assessment in a workshop, and then were given the responsibility of doing so with the students they were assigned. Due to the time-intensiveness of the administration process, the school chose to bring in and train substitute teachers and assign an out-of-classroom teacher to handle it for all students in the spring.
  
- b. *Results:* The data show dramatic improvement in kindergarten:
  - General Knowledge and Language (+20.6 NCEs)
  - Reading (+22.1 NCEs)
  - Graphomotor-Writing Skills (+27.1 NCEs)  
First Grade improvement was strong but less so, and less even:
  - Basic Reading (+11.9 NCEs)
  - General Knowledge and Language (+6.0 NCEs)
  - Reading Comprehension (+4.9 NCEs)
  - Reading (+10.6 NCEs)
  - Written Expression (+22.5 NCEs)
  
- c. *Evaluation:* The data, somewhat unwieldy in the amount of information and the number of subtests available, showed that Harlem Link made progress (in some cases significant progress) in all areas, when comparing children to the nationally normed group. If the Brigance were a perfect predictor of the state assessment—and the school leaders, for a variety of reasons, do not believe this is the case—the data would make a strong case for meeting the *Value Added* criteria for the goal. Issues that the school leaders had with the Brigance assessments included that: there were questions about its alignment both with the school curriculum and the State Performance Standards; it does not simulate the State Performance Assessment in that it is a one-on-one assessment; it is quite cumbersome to administer (with some sections not applying to children of certain ages, for example), causing the school to be unable to administer all subtests to all students; and its length, format and detail are designed for individual assessment to determine strengths and weaknesses of individual students, but are not as useful on a classroom level for informing instruction. Finally, partly due to the immense resources required for administration, the school was unable to secure disinterested outside experts to administer and/or score the Brigance.
  
- d. *Further Evidence:* Due to the cumbersome nature of the administration task, teachers and administrators did not perform an item-by-item analysis of these assessments.

## **Summary**

It is clear from the data that, in its first year, Harlem Link has not yet attained the educational excellence in ELA promised in the charter. However, the data also show—in the form of dramatic improvements on the Brigance and, more importantly, steady improvement on the DRA—that the school is well on its way to meeting this goal by the time the first third graders take the state exam in 2008. In a start-up year, a year marked by the gradual process of lateral decision making, debate and difference of opinion, and hence the lowest level of consistency the school will ever tolerate, the assessment data confirmed teacher anecdotal evidence that there were still tremendous academic gains by students.

Classroom evaluations by the school leaders indicated a more consistent set of systems and routines in some classrooms than others; as demonstrated by Classrooms A and B mentioned above, the test data confirmed that the children in these more consistent classrooms achieved at a higher level.

In 2006-2007, the school will more explicitly define the parts of the literacy curriculum for teachers, based on the successful components put in place by these model classrooms (and the most effective systems in all classrooms). A unified Scope and Sequence—developed during the school year and being finalized by teachers, the instructional leader and an educational consultant in advance of the Summer Institute as of this writing—will be the central curricular document, to encourage long-term planning in every classroom. Grade teams will plan Units of Study together, to ensure evenly high quality across the classrooms.

In terms of assessment, the 2006 Summer Institute will be an occasion to create consistency in observation and recording of specific behaviors related to literacy development in early childhood. The importance of the DRA assessment will be emphasized. During the school year, Harlem Link will not use Brigance on all students, due to the variety of issues its implementation raised in 2005-2006 and questions around its usefulness on the classroom or school level. The Student Support office (including the Social Worker, Student Support Coordinator and Reading Specialist) will continue to use Brigance when deemed necessary to gain deeper information about a child's learning style. Schoolwide, Harlem Link will use a nationally normed test such as *Terra Nova* (for Mathematics as well as ELA), which better aligns with the state assessment.

## ***Major Goal: Mathematics***

**Goal:** Students will demonstrate competency in understanding and application of mathematical computation and problem-solving.

### **Measures**

#### *Absolute Proficiency*

For the 2007-08 through 2008-09 school years, 75 percent of third through fourth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Mathematics examination.

Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State math exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.

#### *Comparative*

Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Math exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district.

Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State Math exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to small degree) according to a regression analysis, performed by the Charter Schools Institute, controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.

#### *Value Added*

For the 2008-09 school year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State Math exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State Math exam.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Findings**

*Method:* Harlem Link does not have any children eligible to take the State Mathematics examination.

#### **Additional Measures**

The school employed several different assessments to determine students' progress in Mathematics. Early Childhood Assessment of Mathematics (ECAM) and the Brigance assessment are discussed below.

#### **Early Childhood Assessment of Mathematics (ECAM)**

- a. *Method:* The ECAM was designed by team members of Mathematics in the City, the think tank and staff development center contracted by Harlem Link in 2005-2006. It was administered to kindergarten students and scored, by teachers, twice during the year—once in the fall for baseline data and again in the spring. Teachers were trained on administering the ECAM during staff development sessions with a Math in the City staff developer. The language used in the ECAM, and the specific decisions required by teachers to judge whether a response fit the criteria of Beginner, Developing, Proficient or Advanced, are part of the Math in the City teacher training program.
- b. *Results:* The data show that on the 11 skill areas (Rote Counting; One to One Tagging with Synchrony; Resultative Counting; Counting on; Magnitude; Hierarchical Inclusion; One to One Correspondence; Conservation of Number; Part/Whole; Reading Numbers; and Writing Numbers), children's responses were judged to represent Proficient or Advanced thinking 63% of the time.
- c. *Evaluation:* The ECAM data do not suggest that the school has yet met the goal, but are extremely encouraging for future growth in the kindergarten class. The school utilizes the TERC curriculum, one which teaches deep conceptual thinking that builds over time. Skills are not taught in isolation (though, in consideration of the at-risk status of the majority of the students at Harlem Link, the school is supplementing the program with teacher-made skill drill activities), and in the school leaders' experience, it often takes a minimum two years of consistent TERC instruction before dramatic gains are evident.
- d. *Further evidence:* There is reason for optimism within the test scores. An item analysis of the June ECAM results shows that the children scored lowest on items that require abstract thinking (Part/Whole [24% Beginner], Hierarchical Inclusion [39% Beginner], and Conservation of Number [51% Beginner]), while scoring the highest on items that form the basis of number sense on which to build in later years—the Advanced category was judged the most for counting and comparing items such as Resultative Counting and Magnitude.

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<sup>2</sup> If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.

## **Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills (CIBS)**

- a. *Method:* See above (English Language Arts section)
- b. *Results:* As in the ELA subtests, the data show dramatic improvement in kindergarten, incremental in first grade:

Kindergarten Mathematics (+28.9 NCEs)

First Grade Mathematics (+0.2 NCEs)

First Grade Mathematics Computation (+14.2 NCEs)

- c. *Evaluation:* While the kindergarten math instruction has surely been strong based on this data, there is clearly room for improvement in the schoolwide program. The kindergarten data offers promising news for continued improvement towards meeting the goal. Overall, due again to questionable alignment with the state performance standard, the data from Brigance are largely inconclusive regarding whether the school is on track to meet the goal.
- d. *Further Evidence:* As with the ELA subtests, Harlem Link did not perform an item analysis on the math subtests of the Brigance assessment due to its cumbersome nature. One section—the first grade Mathematics—calls for such an analysis prior to the start of the 2006-2007 school year due to the number of children who persisted in scoring in the lowest quartile of the normed group. On these assessments, more than 50% of the first graders placed in the lowest quartile on both the baseline administration and the spring administration.

### **Summary**

TERC is a very difficult program to implement, and the successful data presented herein suggest that the school is on the right track, but the inconsistency of some results raises the question of whether the school is properly implementing the curriculum. While some of Harlem Link's teachers had experience working with this curriculum prior to teaching at the school, the majority did not. The school offered professional development in sending one teacher from each classroom to the Math in the City summer institute, then provided staff development for all teachers five days during the school year. For the 2006-2007 school year, the school will respond to the need to raise student achievement by taking a more strategic approach to professional development. Though the urgency of working with many at-risk youth and the short term of the charter is clear, the school is taking a patient approach to teaching the teachers how to properly implement this potentially powerful curriculum. The school leaders have identified three teacher leaders—one in each grade—who will receive the vast majority of the professional development. They will, in turn, lead the staff in grade-level planning through the newly revised Mathematics Scope and Sequence, aided by the fact that 100% of the teaching staff is returning, building on prior knowledge and training. The number of days of professional development will also be increased apace—where eight teachers shared 5 days of professional development last year, there will now be three teachers sharing 20 such days.

Finally, the school will attempt to work from a position of strength by streamlining implementation of skill-based activities that supplement the abstract thinking trained in TERC. The data suggesting that the students fared better on the foundational skill-based tasks of ECAM belie the fact that these skills were taught differently in each classroom. Along with a clarified Scope and Sequence, the teacher leaders will be able to work with the instructional leader to implement consistent activities across classrooms for skill building and fact memorization.

## ***Major Goal: Science***

**Goal:** Students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.

### **Measures**

#### *Absolute*

Each year, 75 percent of fourth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science examination.

#### *Comparative*

Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Science exam will be greater than that of the local school district.

### **Findings**

*Method:* Harlem Link does not have any children eligible for the State Science examination.

## ***Additional Required Outcome Measure***

Under the state's NCLB accountability system, the school's Accountability Status will be "Good Standing" each year.

### **Findings**

Due to the fact of not having any children eligible for state assessments, the State Education Department has assigned a "Good Standing" Accountability Status to Harlem Link.

## ***Organizational Goals***

Although Harlem Link does not have organizational goals in its Accountability Plan, as a first year organization the school is compelled to demonstrate stability by reporting on these optional measures.

### **Continual Student Enrollment**

The school is in its first year, and thusly has no comparative data from year to year. However, the school is fully enrolled for 2005-2006, is experiencing student attrition within expected ranges (5 to 10% of students from spring to fall), and as of this writing has a waiting list of over 67% of the student population. The school's Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollment for 2005-2006, expected to be 108 in the charter, was 107.5 according to the State Education Department's FTE calculator.

### **Legal Compliance**

Harlem Link has followed all applicable laws, rules and regulations, and the provisions of the school's by-laws and charter.

Harlem Link has maintained effective systems, policies, procedures and other controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements are met.

Harlem Link does not currently have a relationship with independent legal counsel. The school has tapped pro bono services at the firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison for occasions such as document review this year—no court action or other need for legal advice has arisen. Though no corrective action has been put in place by the Institute, the school is aware of the need to take preventive action in this area, and has contracted Raj Thakkar of Charter School Business Management (CSBM) to pursue pro bono counsel for the school through Atlantic Legal Services or Lawyers Alliance of New York.

**Fiscal Soundness: Budgeting**

The school did not experience negative variances between actual revenues and expenses or between budgeted and actual revenues; in fact, the school, budgeting conservatively, spent less than expected and earned more than projected.

**Fiscal Soundness: Financial Condition**

The school has \$475,050.32 in unrestricted net assets at the close of the 2005-2006 fiscal year. This amount represents 24.6% of the school's projected operating expenses for the next fiscal year.

**Fiscal Soundness: Internal Controls and Compliance**

There are no internal control or financial compliance deficiencies to report.