



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

## **Harbor Science and Arts Charter School**

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# **School Evaluation Report 2008-2009**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), jointly with the New York State Board of Regents, are required by law to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the State University Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The State University Trustees, however, consistent with the goals of the New York State Charter Schools Act of 1998, view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively than purely monitoring compliance. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Charter Schools Institute (“the Institute”) to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals:

- **Facilitate Improvement.** By providing substantive information about the school’s academic, fiscal and organizational strengths and weaknesses to the school’s board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school identify areas for improvement.
- **Disseminate Information.** The Institute disseminates information about the school’s performance not only to its board of trustees, administration and faculty, but to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located.
- **Document Performance.** The Institute collects information to build a database of a school’s performance over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute can more clearly ascertain trends, determine areas of strength and weakness, and assess the school’s likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute is in a better position to make recommendations regarding the renewal of each school’s charter, and the State University Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school’s charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

The Institute regularly collects a range of data about each school’s performance over the course of its charter period, which ultimately contributes to its renewal recommendation. These data include student performance results, financial audits, any legal records of issues addressed, board meeting minutes, and reports from regular evaluation visits conducted by the Institute (or external experts contracted by the Institute) and other agencies with oversight responsibilities.

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding this year’s visit to the school. The second section, titled School Description, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. Finally, this report presents the evidence and conclusions from an evaluation visit conducted in the current school year in a third section, titled School Evaluation Visit. Within this section is a summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations.

Because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement with respect to the school’s performance as compared to the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use this evaluation report in ongoing planning and school improvement efforts.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit to the Harbor Science and Arts Charter School, the school appears to continue to achieve its mission. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

### *Academic Success*

School leaders set high expectations for student achievement, provide teachers with ongoing and systematic support, and conduct regular and useful teacher evaluations. School leaders actively monitor progress in meeting the school's Accountability Plan goals. The school regularly administers useful school-wide assessments and has procedures in place to collect and analyze their results. Teachers use assessment results to adjust and improve classroom instruction and to identify students for remediation.

The school has developed a curriculum in English language arts and mathematics that is aligned to standards. Insofar as they prepare students for state assessments, these curricula are aligned grade to grade. While the mathematics curriculum is comprehensive, the English language arts curriculum is still not fully developed, especially in 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The school has documents (scope and sequence and pacing guides) to assist teachers with lesson planning, but it does not have a well-defined process for reviewing and revising the English language arts curriculum.

Teachers demonstrate competency in the subjects and grade levels they teach. Instruction is focused on clear learning objectives and functional skills. However, as a result of the school's questioning techniques and teacher-student interaction, most instruction does not promote development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills. The school deploys sufficient resources to meet the range of student needs and has effective intervention programs to meet the needs of struggling students.

A safe and orderly environment has been established throughout the school building. Classroom management techniques employed by teachers help to establish an environment where learning is clearly valued and evident. Professional growth is encouraged, and there are opportunities for professional development during child study team and school level meetings; however, the school does not have a sustained and cohesive professional development program.

### *Organizational Capacity*

The school's day-to-day operations are competently managed. The organizational structure supports distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

The board has adequate skills and expertise to govern the school. It has devoted adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school and has abided by a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy. The board is focused on student achievement and the school's academic Accountability Plan goals and receives sufficient information from school leaders to provide effective oversight. The school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school's leader.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Harbor Science and Arts Charter School (“Harbor”) was approved by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York in January 2000 and by the Board of Regents in April of that same year. The school opened in September 2000, serving 149 students in kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Harbor currently serves 212 students in grades 1-8.

The school remains at its original location, One East 104<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 603 in East Harlem, New York, occupying two full floors within the large building operated by Boys & Girls Harbor, Inc., a community youth organization offering after-school and summer programs to children and families from East and Central Harlem each year. The school has established a strong partnership with Boys & Girls Harbor and has use of the facility’s cafeteria and swimming pool. Harbor students also have the opportunity to participate in unique after-school, summer, literacy and performing arts programs.

On March 1, 2005, the State University Trustees awarded Harbor a Short-Term Renewal for a period of two years, providing the school with an opportunity to build on the successes realized primarily in its fourth year of operation. The Board of Regents approved the renewal on May 17, 2005.

On January 21, 2007, the State University Trustees granted the school a Full-Term Renewal of five years, which was approved by the Board of Regents on March 20<sup>th</sup> of that same year.

As of the date of this evaluation visit, the board of trustees of Harbor Science and Arts Charter School was comprised of the following individuals:

- Mr. Alvin Patrick, Chair;
- Mr. Jim Isenberg, Vice-Chair;
- Mr. Robert North;
- Mr. Richard Asche;
- Ms. Heather Carter;
- Ms. Luly Duke;
- Ms. Susan Etes;
- Ms. Regina Graham;
- Mr. Hans E. Hageman;
- Mr. Al Jackson;
- Mr. Phil Salmon; and
- Ms. Lisa Stenson.

The Harbor Science and Arts Charter School’s mission statement is as follows:

*It is the mission of the Harbor Science and Arts Charter School to provide students with a quality education through a rigorous academic program that infuses character building, physical wellness and the arts. Students will graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in higher learning institutions and have the capability to make a positive contribution to society.*

Key design elements include:

- a summer readiness program in grades 2 and 3 that prepares students for the upcoming school year in English language arts and mathematics;
- for grades 1-5, at least two teachers in the classroom at all times;
- smaller class sizes in the upper grades (6-8) to ensure that student needs are truly met through modified curriculum and instruction;
- emphasizing literacy and numeracy in the lower grades (1-3), and devoting at least 60% of the academic time to those subject areas; and;
- remediation classes for students who are at-risk and are in need of extra support in English language arts and mathematics.

The school has developed *Harbor Science and Arts Charter School Benchmarks* for both writing and mathematics which are aligned to the New York State standards. The benchmarks are now seamless across all grade levels. The school utilizes McGraw-Hill literacy materials and Kaplan test preparation materials for English language arts. The school utilizes the Saxon math curriculum, supplemented by the problem-solving component of the McGraw-Hill mathematics series.

**School Year (2008-09)**

180 instructional days for grades 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8  
 195 instructional days for grades 2 and 3 (this includes a summer readiness program)

**School Day (2008-09)**

8:30 a.m. to 2:50 for grades 1-4  
 8:00 a.m. to 2:50 for grades 4-8

**Enrollment**

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2000-01	132	149	K-6	K-6	K-6	Yes
2001-02	154	155	K-7	K-7	K-7	Yes
2002-03	176	175	K-8	1-8	K-8	Yes
2003-04	196	196	K-8	1-8	1-8	Yes
2004-05	196	208	K-8	1-8	1-8	Yes
2005-06	210	211	1-8		1-8	Yes
2006-07	210	210	1-8		1-8	Yes
2007-08	222	213	1-8			Yes
2008-09	228	212	1-8			Yes

<sup>1</sup> Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the New York State Education Department School Report Card and Database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

## Demographic Data<sup>2</sup>

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #4 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #4 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #4 Enrollment
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.6	0	1
Black or African American	79.5	32.8	80.8	32.7	77	32
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.0	2.9	0.5	3.3	0	4
Hispanic	20.5	61.7	17.8	61.5	22	62
White	0.0	1.9	0.5	1.8	0	2
Multiracial <sup>3</sup>	-	-	0.5	0.0	0	0
<b>Special Populations</b>						
Students with Disabilities	13.5	N/A	11.7	18.4	N/A	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0.0	12.3	0.0	12.0	0	13
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>						
Eligible for Free Lunch	54.0	77.4	51.6	77.0	50	74
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	24.7	6.8	21.1	5.2	20	6

<sup>2</sup> Source: 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 School Report Cards (New York State Education Department). Note the State Education Department does not report special education data.

<sup>3</sup> Multiracial enrollment data were not collected statewide in the 2005-06 school year.

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

### **Background**

Regardless of the type of visit, Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are organized around a set of benchmarks that address the academic success of the school including teaching and learning, e.g. curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Called the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks, these established criteria are used on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

While the primary focus of the visit is an evaluation of the school's academic program, issues regarding compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety it may take additional and immediate action; however, monitoring for compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit.

This section of the School Evaluation Report begins with a summary of the observations and conclusions from previous visits to the school. This information is used by evaluation teams in preparation for the visit and assists the observers in understanding the accomplishments and challenges the school has faced. Similarly, this information provides the reader with insight into the Institute's monitoring of the school's academic program and conclusions from prior visits, including those conducted by external experts on behalf of the Institute. Following this summary is a detailed analysis of the observations and conclusions from this year's evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team is provided.

### **Summary of Previous Evaluation Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a renewal visit of Harbor Science and Arts Charter School on October 4, 2006. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. A Subsequent Renewal Report was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit, which are briefly summarized below.

The instructional leadership team provided significant pedagogical support to teachers in pursuit of high levels of student learning and achievement such that teachers had internalized the message of high expectations. By consistently documenting individual teacher progress, conducting ongoing, informal teacher observations, providing rapid feedback to teachers based on those observations, discussing progress during face-to-face meetings, and offering first-year teachers daily in-class coaching, the school's leadership customized its teacher support.

The instructional leadership team had identified aspects of the academic program that needed improvement and developed plans to put alternative systems in place. After six years of operation, Harbor continued to revise and refine its academic program. In response to the Institute's conclusions in Harbor's Initial Renewal Report, the school leadership implemented many changes including: replacing the model of two teachers in a classroom to a lead teacher and an assistant in

each classroom; formulating more rigorous assessment systems for student writing; and instituting school-wide curriculum benchmarks to replace the previous curriculum.

The quality of classroom instruction ranged from adequate to high. At the time of the renewal visit, inspectors found that lessons were generally clear to students. Teachers asked probing questions, and many students were performing at high levels. The school had a well-developed system for identifying special needs and at-risk students and implemented an inclusionary remedial program.

The school's instructional leadership team reported that they were developing interim assessments aligned to the school's curriculum benchmarks. However, at the time of the visit, the process for aligning interim assessments with the school's curriculum was not clear. It was also unclear how and to what extent interim assessments would be developed and administered in literacy, given the absence of a uniform curriculum. Notwithstanding the absence of these documents and related procedures at the time of the renewal visit, the leadership team's unrelenting focus on and effectiveness in improving the quality of daily instruction increased the likelihood that Harbor would continue to improve student learning and achievement.

The school was an effective and viable organization in terms of its corporate governance and ability to meet legal requirements. The school director provided regular reports in writing to the school's board on key indicators of the school's academic progress, including student achievement data and progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals. In turn, the board provided constructive criticism by asking the director to explain planning decisions. The board was knowledgeable about the school's academic program and understood the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth so as to provide effective program oversight

## **Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence**

### *Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)*

The school regularly administers school-wide interim assessments. At the time of the prior renewal visit, the process for developing interim assessments aligned with the school's curriculum had not been clear, especially in literacy, given the absence of a uniform English language arts curriculum. While Harbor now has an interim assessment system firmly in place which mirrors the state testing program, its utility in the lower grades continues to be limited to the extent that the school has not established an English language arts curriculum for the lower grades.

Teachers receive spreadsheets and graphs of student results and meet with school leaders to analyze data, which they say helps teachers to “isolate the skills and concepts that students are lacking.” Teachers noted that interim assessments were helpful, especially the resulting item-skills analyses.

In addition to the interim assessments, the school administers nationally-normed standardized tests in reading and mathematics. At the time of the visit, Harbor was in the midst of changing from the ITBS test to the Gates MacGinitie Test in most grades. At the beginning of the year, the special education and intervention staff also administered the AIMS assessment, a diagnostic assessment used to identify students in need of special intervention.

Teachers administer a variety of informal classroom assessments. In the lower grades, teachers reported using a variety of classroom assessments such as independent work, observations, running

records, writing samples, unit tests and Saxon math assessments. In the upper grades, most teachers utilize an array of assessments, including graded in-class assignments, in-class quizzes, graded homework, prepared oral presentations and performance/drama-based assessments. Some teachers conduct Do Now activities to determine the level of comprehension and skill acquisition of previously-taught lessons. One teacher has developed an elaborate and effective system that involves administering assessments every two weeks that ask students to respond to questions and reflect on their explanations. The teacher then works with students individually to improve their responses until they meet standards, at which time the work is posted.

The school has procedures in place to collect and analyze assessment results; however, the procedures for evaluating student work do not ensure validity and reliability, especially in writing. School leaders provide teachers with interim assessment data results and lead analysis meetings in order to inform whole class instruction and student grouping. Teachers reported looking at individual test questions and, with the support of school leaders, highlighting trends in student responses.

Student writing is kept in writing folders and displayed in classrooms and on bulletin boards in hallways. The folders contain work related to the writing process, including graphic organizers and first drafts. In one classroom, there was evidence of student writing across the content areas displayed on the wall. Displays in classrooms and the halls were labeled with task descriptions and rubrics, but the posted student work samples lacked comments or other evidence that rubrics were actively used for the assessment or to provide feedback. The inspection team did not observe any rubric-assessed student work displayed in classrooms or student notebooks. One teacher stated that she incorporates rubric-based writing assignments at the end of marking periods, which is just four times per year. Another teacher reported that the teaching staff was working with school leaders to develop standards rubrics that were aligned across grade levels. A different teacher stated that “students know what is expected based on rubrics,” but could not speak specifically about how the rubrics were used by students or staff to evaluate work. As such, the visit team concluded that rubric-based writing assessments are not a core component of teachers’ practices.

The school effectively uses results to adjust and improve classroom instruction. With administrators’ guidance, teachers review the assessment data to determine what needs to be re-taught and to identify students who are in need of tutoring or pull-out during lunch or after-school; this data is also used as a basis for focused discussions with school leaders about modifying instructional practices. One teacher reported that based on the data, “we modify lessons, provide graphic organizers, make spatial considerations and give students side support during instruction.” Lower school teachers reported that they provide remediation and intervention during blocks of time when student-to-teacher ratios are decreased by assigning half the class to performing arts activities.

Student and school performance results are shared with parents and the community. Parents receive scores from the nationally-normed tests and the interim assessments, with the results appearing on student report cards. Harbor teachers also regularly communicate with parents about their childrens’ performance. Most student work is sent home. One teacher reported that she informs parents (by text message, phone call or email) when their children do not receive passing grades. The school’s board of trustees, including its parent community members, appeared to be well informed about the overall performance of the school.

### *Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)*

The quality of the school's curriculum varies by subject. Harbor has a clearly defined curriculum in mathematics and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards. Teachers are provided with support documents to help them implement the mathematics program. The assistant principal, who acts as the mathematics coordinator, ensures the alignment of curriculum, assessments and state standards. The mathematics curriculum was comprehensive and, during the visit, Institute inspectors observed math lessons during which students worked on word problems that required them to "solve, check, illustrate, answer, and explain" their thinking.

The Institute's Renewal Recommendation Report notes that Harbor does not have a defined curriculum in English language arts. Because of low performance on the state's English language arts exam in the middle school grades, the school has concentrated on developing curriculum for the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades that was aligned with state standards. Recent results on the state exam attest to improvement in student performance in these grades. Aside from these middle school changes, however, the school has still not developed a 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum in English language arts. As a result, lower grade teachers reported, different classrooms are using various materials for literacy. One teacher indicated that she uses materials from a variety of resources, including trade books and Urban Education Exchange (UEE) comprehension lessons. Another teacher was observed teaching a summarizing lesson from a basal reader called "Treasures." During an interview, this teacher reported that he uses the benchmarks the school developed a couple of years ago along with the teacher's guide for "Treasures" to plan instruction. He stated that school leaders have presented teachers with a variety of curriculum resources to use in developing their lessons.

The school has developed elements of a writing program, but they are neither cohesive nor aligned. An upper-grade teacher has reportedly helped to develop the school's current writing program, focusing on themes, values and identity, and essential questioning. While she has developed rubrics for specific writing assignments, the school does not have a comprehensive set of rubrics across the grades. Expectations for student writing competencies are expressed as general performance indicators. In the 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades, the school has introduced Heartwood Themes (virtues) as a component of the writing curriculum, but they have not been fully incorporated into the writing program.

With the exception of 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts, teachers reported being supported in what to teach and when to teach it. The school has provided them with scope and sequence and pacing guides that guide their lesson planning in general terms. During the inspection visit, teachers commented that the scoped pacing material has worked well this school year. Teachers appreciated the organization of mathematics topics, indicating that they are well integrated and facilitate their teaching. In the upper grades, teachers have a complete binder with daily lesson plans, such that the actual lesson for each day corresponds perfectly with the plans for the day. In these grades, the curriculum aligns every lesson with objectives and documents in each subject area include references to state standards. Finally, new teachers reported that they were given curriculum upon entering the school and felt that it gave a good outline of the work expected of them.

Under the auspices of the assistant principal, the school has a well-defined process for reviewing and revising the mathematics curriculum. On the other hand, the process for developing the English language arts curriculum is based on *ad hoc* plans. During the previous year, the school's operations coordinator worked with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to develop the curriculum for that grade only. At the time of the inspection visit, the curriculum in the lower grades was unfolding; a committee

comprised of five teachers and the special education coordinator and lead by the operations coordinator was working to identify themes and standards. The operations coordinator has begun meeting individually with team members to refine their designs.

### *Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)*

Teachers demonstrate competency in the subjects and grade levels they teach, and instruction is focused on clear learning objectives. Observed lessons provided purposeful learning activities; teachers posted clearly-stated objectives and expectations on white boards. Teachers submit written notes for lessons in a variety of formats to supervisors or supporting administrators.

Students are cognitively engaged and instruction tends to focus on functional skills rather than promoting the development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills. In the upper grades, observed instruction centered on teacher-led questioning, which engaged most students; teachers called on students who did not appear to be tracking the lesson, thereby drawing them into discussions. In these classes, teachers focused on content and skills that appeared well-planned and at or above grade level. They kept lessons well paced, covered the lesson agendas, and accommodated students who could not keep up, suggesting that they were mindful of individual student learning. However, questions and topics posed to students generally remained at the recall level. For example, based on observations of various classes, students were asked questions such as “Which artist did Vincent Van Gogh threaten to attack with a knife?” (5<sup>th</sup> grade); “What is the word for the place where electricity comes from?” (7<sup>th</sup> grade); and “What is the subtrahend?” (8<sup>th</sup> grade). In general, students were able to answer prompted questions and the lesson’s objective was met, but the questioning did not encourage students to evaluate deeply or analyze numerous possible interpretations of the material covered. During class discussion, teachers did not elicit higher order thinking, ask challenging follow-up questions, or get students to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the teacher or each other. Teachers’ primary response to student answers was simply “good job.”

In the lower grades, all observed instruction was whole group with students working on the same task. In one class, students worked with partners on a hands-on science activity but, in preparation for the state science exam, were not allowed to speak with one another. All interactions were between students and teachers. Teachers asked many questions of students but most were at the “knowledge” level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, requiring one or two word answers. In one classroom, teachers asked higher order thinking questions but did not provide sufficient time for students to formulate full answers; the teachers ended up answering the questions themselves.

Instruction is differentiated to some extent to meet the needs of individual students. At times, teachers take advantage of opportunities to support individual students in the school’s ubiquitous small-group settings. In one grade, teachers reported that they differentiate frequently and use assessment results to plan, stating “we modify lessons, provide graphic organizers, make spatial considerations and give students side support during instruction.” They also stated that content is sometimes differentiated through the use of scaffold questioning. In addition, teachers provide individual tutoring during preparation periods and occasionally structure lessons to enable students to work with a partner. Notwithstanding these assertions, there was no specific grouping evident in the classes observed during the visit. In observed classrooms during both literacy and mathematics lessons, students completed the same worksheets as a class and copied notes together off of the whiteboard. One teacher reported that he has used small groups for differentiation in the past, but the management needs of this year’s class

mostly call for whole class instruction, allowing students to work in pairs “going from whole group to partners to whole group.”

### *Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)*

The school provides strong instructional leadership, which sets high expectations for student achievement. There is consistent language about high academic achievement, and the instructional priority of preparing students to succeed on exams is consistently communicated. A teacher reported that school leaders set “the culture of high expectations at our school.” Another indicated that school leaders “expect you to give 110 percent, plan, be prepared, and be involved in the lives of the students.” Still another noted, “the best thing this school does is set high academic expectations and get students to meet them. That’s central to our success.”

Instructional leaders provide teachers with ongoing and systematic support. While the school’s leadership still emanates primarily from the principal, she recently delegated more responsibility to her administrative team. In the current school year, they took over her supervisory responsibilities when she was on leave. In preparation, she and the team set up a system to track classroom visits whereby each leader is expected to conduct one observation per week, with feedback in the form of an observation check-list or a more detailed memo and follow-up at a monthly meeting. These monthly meetings are an extension of the principal’s practice of holding regular one-on-one discussions with each teacher.

Teachers generally expressed satisfaction about the support they had received throughout the school year, with a number indicating that they felt comfortable sharing ideas and getting suggestions for resources and practices from the administrators, whom they described as trusting and trustworthy. One teacher stated, “we get the resources we need, and they are both approachable and responsive.” Another stated, “our concerns can be voiced, and they are open to honest discussion.” A new teacher reported that she receives regular observations, feedback and a supportive critique of practice that is typically followed up with useful modeling.

Teachers reported that there is scheduled time each week devoted to Child Study Team meetings, grade team meetings and grade-leader meetings; however, they did not cite these meetings as evidence of the support they were receiving. As such, there was limited evidence of the content or value of these regular planning opportunities. To the extent that the school is small and there is essentially one lead teacher for each grade’s academic subjects, the opportunities do not have to be carefully scheduled within grades. On the other hand, to the extent that teachers did not collaborate with colleagues across grades, prospects for aligning and integrating curriculum across grades were more limited.

Instructional leaders conduct regular and useful teacher evaluations, though the teacher evaluation system has not been implemented this year. Last year, the principal evaluated teacher progress toward meeting a set of pedagogical goals mid-year and at the end of the year by using rubric scores. If a teacher did not meet a goal, he/she was expected to address the specific goal in the following year. In addition to the evaluation, each teacher was asked to pick a benchmark goal and an aspirational goal, as well as write a reflection on his/her progress. The principal reported that at the beginning of the current year, she worked with the teachers to set goals in five domains, which then became the basis for the monthly one-on-one discussions and for the planned end-of-year evaluations. One teacher reported that part of the evaluation is a formal observation in which the principal conducts a pre-observation discussion, a review of the lesson plan, a full period observation and a discussion on rigor, end results and assessment.

Instructional leaders adequately monitor and evaluate the academic program and its intervention activities. Based on state exam results and as an outgrowth of discussions with the school's board of trustees, the administration has revamped the middle school English language arts program. The assistant principal tracks assessment results and has used the information to revise the mathematics curriculum.

#### *At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)*

The school has defined processes for identifying struggling students. Under the auspices of the special education coordinator, the Child Study Team (CST) uses assessment results to determine within-class intervention strategies and at-risk groupings for remedial support. Teachers filled out a checklist for the coordinator, who prioritized the submissions and decided whether she could provide a short-term intervention without presenting to the CST. The coordinator reported that the introduction of a Response to Intervention (RTI) program has had the benefit of helping teachers to understand the variety of services better, especially the special education program, and to take more initiative in developing in-class intervention strategies. The special education coordinator also reported that while teachers do discuss individual action plans at the CST meetings, the follow-up to such discussions is informal — not documented or based on a consistent set of procedures.

The school deploys sufficient resources and has harnessed a variety of programs to address the range of its students' needs. The principal and special education coordinator monitor the performance of students receiving special interventions and reflect on the efficacy of the services. Aside from a Saturday program to help students prepare for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade state exams, the school provided the following out-of-classroom support for general education students during the 2008-09 school year: middle-school teacher tutoring for students whose report card grades indicated that they were at risk of being held back; remedial support for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in an extended day program provided by the principal; and a pull-out program provided by a resource room teacher and the operations coordinator. At the time of the inspection visit, two resource room teachers provided academic support to 24 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The school introduced the RTI program to monitor the effectiveness of supports for students who had not been identified for special education services. The school's special education department tracked student progress in the various programs in 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade using a benchmark test of fluency and comprehension as well as the interim assessments. The upper grade evaluation of student progress was reported to be more anecdotal. The principal also used interim assessment results to monitor the effectiveness of the various services.

The school does not currently provide adequate training and support to help teachers meet students' needs, particularly those responsible for the upper grades. Teachers had trouble identifying which students had IEPs in their classes and provided little evidence that they have acquired the instructional tools necessary to support struggling students. One teacher noted that while data is thoroughly analyzed and discussed, it is often difficult to determine how to turn this information into practice beyond the one-on-one push-in and pull-out services provided by the special education and intervention staff. Insofar as teachers are able to model the interventions of these specialists, especially in the lower grades, they have adopted procedures and skills for dealing with the target students; however, this guidance is *ad hoc* and situational. In the current year, Harbor has provided

limited professional development to general education teachers that would enable them to address special education issues such as varying learning styles and differentiation.

#### *Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)*

A safe and orderly environment has been established throughout the school building. At the time of the visit the school climate was calm and quiet, and most students were clearly following rules, attentive, and focused on lessons. Teacher-student interactions were warm and supportive and teachers reported that students feel safe and happy at school.

Teachers employ classroom management techniques that establish an environment where learning is clearly valued and evident. Low-level misbehavior is not tolerated in classrooms. Transitions between lessons and classes are orderly and efficient. Classroom management appears to be in the service of learning. Most of the students observed were engaged; those who were disengaged were quickly admonished by teachers and readily responded appropriately. The inspection team observed very little student misbehavior. Teachers calmly redirected a student who was chatting or out of his/her seat with a reminder or warning.

The family handbook outlines the school's discipline policy, including the keeping of anecdotal records and the use of discipline slips. The board of trustees has recently established a discipline committee to develop a more explicit policy on student suspensions and expulsions. At the time of the visit, some teachers were unclear about the discipline system. Each teacher had a behavior incentive plan that he/she had developed and as such, they had their own expectations for acceptable behavior. Class rules and expectations were typically posted on classroom walls. Teachers used praise to reinforce expected behaviors as part of a class-specific incentive system.

#### *Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)*

The school does not have a sustained and cohesive professional development program. Teachers get support from the school leadership, but professional development activities are not systematically implemented. Professional growth is encouraged and there are opportunities for professional development during CST and school level meetings; however, the school does not have a professional development program that is tailored to teachers' varying levels of expertise.

The "program" consists of a number of independent events. Teachers reported that there are three professional development days during the school-year on which they attend outside conferences or in-house workshops. For example, one teacher provided turn-key training to staff based on a workshop she had attended. In other instances, teachers attend workshops on basic instructional techniques separate from the rest of the staff, but there is no continuity or follow-up after attending. Interviewed teachers were unaware of a comprehensive school-wide professional development plan.

Teachers do get support from the school leadership, but professional development activities do not adequately address the collective needs of teachers. Aside from training in data analysis techniques, the other regular opportunities for developing individual competencies -- child study and grade-level meetings -- are not systematically implemented.

### *Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)*

Harbor has established an elaborate organizational structure with staff, systems and procedures in place that allow the school to carry out its academic program. The school leaders understand their roles, and the teachers have a clear understanding of the lines of authority. In interviews, teachers were clear about from whom they should request support for resources, discipline, planning, assessments, etc. The division of responsibility within subject areas and for special education services functions well. The teaching organization within classrooms, including three different models across the grades for delivering instruction, continues to be effective insofar as teachers with the appropriate organizational skills and experience are tapped to fill the various teaching assignments (i.e., lead, assistant and co-teacher).

Under the overarching leadership of the principal, the school's day-to-day operations are competently managed. Teachers reported that this supervision of the school contributes to a positive working environment. The board and staff consistently reported that the intended absence of the principal for a few months had had a salutary effect on the school. As a result of careful planning, the school operated with more dispersed leadership. One teacher reported that the principal's leave was so well planned that she did not feel any less supported than when the principal was at the school. Another teacher commented that while the parents may have missed their rapport with the principal during that time, the school ran smoothly in her absence. Board members indicated that the arrangement necessitated that the principal delegate more authority than she was accustomed and gave the administrative team more leadership responsibilities than they had previously had.

### *Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)*

The board of trustees has the skill sets, structures and procedures to adequately govern the school. The members contribute their educational, legal, financial, and management expertise to their school governance responsibilities. In addition to these competences, the board also includes the leadership of the parents association, which lends critical perspective to board decision-making.

Since the renewal inspection visit, the board has strengthened its structures, especially in finance and academic oversight. In its renewal report, the Institute expressed concern about the functioning of these two important board committees. Under the leadership of its chair and with the active participation of its members, the finance committee has established clear procedures for overseeing the development of annual budgets, monitoring expenses and preparing audits.

According to board minutes, the academic oversight committee has been working with the principal to improve various aspects of the educational program. By looking to the committee members for advice and using them as well-informed consultants, the principal has undertaken a range of initiatives to improve the school organization and its program. After the principal raised an issue and discussed it with the committee, they collectively formulated an action plan, which was then presented to the full board for its review. The dynamic of focused committee work complimented by general board oversight of proposed initiatives appears to be effective.

In addition to tightening the organizational structure of its committees, the board has made structural improvements to mitigate the potential for conflicts of interest. While the board has been diligent in managing conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner, it has taken a number of steps to enable it to avoid them altogether. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, a number of the board members were still serving on the board of Boys and Girls Harbor, Inc., which owns the facility in

which the school is housed. Currently, only one board member sits on the board of both entities and the size of the school's board has increased to twelve members, diluting the influence of this member. In addition, the school has employed a financial officer who is independent of Boys and Girls Harbor.

The board is focused on student achievement and the school's academic Accountability Plan goals and communicates its goals and priorities to the school administration. The board devotes time during its meetings to discussion of the school's performance based on the Accountability Plan's specific measures. By disaggregating the data to consider the performance of middle school versus elementary grades and English language arts in comparison to math, they have clearly used the data to carry out their oversight responsibilities.

The board has capably evaluated the school leader, using the same protocol over the past few years. The board has set goals in twelve domains, focusing on achievement indicators and leadership characteristics; it then reviews outcomes with the school leader as part of the process of setting goals for each subsequent year. While it appreciates the principal's leadership qualities, the board also recognizes the possibilities for growth and thus has engaged a coach to support the principal in carrying out her leadership role. As a result, the principal has become more effective in delegating responsibility to the other administrators; she has been able to prioritize more effectively, and the school's administrative structures have been strengthened.

### **Conduct of the Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Evaluation Visit at Harbor Science and Arts Charter School on April 28, 2009. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

**Ron Miller, Ph. D. (Team Leader)** has been the Vice President for Accountability at the Charter Schools Institute since September 2002. Before joining the Institute, he taught for seven years in the New York City public schools. After that, Dr. Miller joined the central offices of the New York City Department of Education, where he conducted evaluative research and organizational studies. As Director of the Office of School Planning and Accountability, he served as the educational accountability officer for the Department. In that capacity, he developed school accountability reports for the city schools and coordinated staff development on their use for district administrators in all the high school and community school districts. In addition, he worked with school leaders to develop their competence to use data for school improvement. In this role he developed PASS, a school performance review system which was adopted in 600 city schools. Dr. Miller has regularly presented papers at annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association and has served as Adjunct Assistant Professor at Teachers College Columbia University and Pace University. He holds an AB degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology from Columbia University.

**Adam Aberman (Consultant to the Institute):** Prior to becoming Youth Venture's Director of Global Online Strategy, Adam was the Executive Director and Founder (and is currently a board member) of icouldbe.org, the non-profit Internet-based career mentoring program that has served over 5,000 teens nationwide and in Tanzania. Adam is also the Principal and Founder of The Learning Collective, a consulting organization that strengthens practices of youth-serving organizations. Prior to establishing icouldbe.org, Adam was a Regional Coordinator for the New

York City Department of Education. Adam began his career in education as a Spanish bilingual public school teacher in Los Angeles. Adam received a B.A. from Vassar College and a Master's in Public Policy, with an emphasis on Education, from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

**Josie Carbone (External Team Member):** Josie Carbone is a member of New Leaders for New Schools Cohort 8. In preparation for her role as a school leader, Josie is completing a year-long fellowship as the resident principal at Girls Preparatory Charter School on the Lower East Side. Josie comes to NLNS after eleven years as an educator in New York City public schools. Most recently, Josie worked at the Bronx Charter School for the Arts where she served first as a founding Lead Teacher and then as the Lower School Director. Additionally, Josie is an adjunct faculty member at Bank Street College. She earned a bachelor's degree from Smith College and a master's degree from Bank Street College. Josie is currently completing a master's degree in educational leadership at Baruch College in collaboration with NLNS. Next year, Josie is slated to lead the second Girls Prep Charter School in East Harlem.

**Michael Rothman Simon (External Team Member):** Michael Rothman currently works as a Transfer School Specialist at New Visions for Public Schools. Prior to this, he served as an Achievement Coach for the New York City Department of Education. Michael's education career started in Boston, where he co-founded and served as executive director of the Project for School Innovation, a grassroots network that connected charter and district public schools. Michael has edited 13 publications and produced 8 documentary videos developed by teachers and principals on effective education practice. Michael has presented at national conferences of the USED Charter School Office, the National Staff Development Council, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. He holds a M.P.P. from the Harvard Kennedy School, a B.A. in political science from Brown University, and served as a Jane Addams Fellow at the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy.

## APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

*An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.*

*Visit the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc> to see the complete listing of Benchmarks.*

Benchmarks 1B – 1H, and Benchmarks 2A – 2E were using in conducting this evaluation visit.

<b>Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</b>	
<u><b>Evidence Category</b></u>	<u><b>State University Renewal Benchmarks</b></u>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1B</b></p> <p><b>Use of Assessment Data</b></p>	<p><b>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and state performance standards;</li> <li>• the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board;</li> <li>• the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy;</li> <li>• the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved;</li> <li>• the school’s leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school’s academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services;</li> <li>• the school’s teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students;</li> <li>• a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade;</li> <li>• the school regularly communicates each student’s progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and</li> <li>• the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1C</b></p> <p><b>Curriculum</b></p>	<p><b>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>• the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school’s curriculum framework,</li> </ul>

	<p>identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade;</li> <li>teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans;</li> <li>teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school’s curriculum;</li> <li>the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and</li> <li>the curriculum supports the school’s stated mission.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogy</b></p>	<p><b>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach;</li> <li>instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson;</li> <li>lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school’s student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments;</li> <li>all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time;</li> <li>learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and</li> <li>teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1E</b></p> <p><b>Instructional Leadership</b></p>	<p><b>The school has strong instructional leadership.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement;</li> <li>the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement);</li> <li>the school’s instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness;</li> <li>the school’s instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms;</li> <li>the school’s leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas;</li> <li>the school’s instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual</li> </ul>

<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1F</b></p> <p><b>At-Risk Students</b></p>	<p>teachers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school’s leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and</li> <li>the school’s leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school’s academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.</li> </ul> <p><b>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs;</li> <li>all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students;</li> <li>the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures;</li> <li>all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students’ Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and</li> <li>the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 1G</b></p> <p><b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b></p>	<p><b>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied;</li> <li>classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident;</li> <li>low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and</li> <li>throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.</li> </ul>
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</p> <p><b>Professional Development</b></p>	<p><b>The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers’ pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program;</li> <li>the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s</li> </ul>

	<p>mission, curriculum, and instructional programs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests;</li> <li>• professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school’s Accountability Plan goals;</li> <li>• teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities;</li> <li>• the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers’ varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities;</li> <li>• the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and</li> <li>• the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.</li> </ul>
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<b>Renewal Question 2</b> <b>Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</b>	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2A</b></p> <p><b>Mission &amp; Key Design Elements</b></p>	<p><b>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stakeholders are aware of the mission;</li> <li>• the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and</li> <li>• the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2B</b></p> <p><b>Parents &amp; Students</b></p>	<p><b>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school;</li> <li>• the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it;</li> <li>• few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school;</li> <li>• a large number of parents seek entrance to the school;</li> <li>• parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and</li> <li>• the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Organizational Capacity</b></p>	<p><b>The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations;</li> <li>• staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school’s mission;</li> <li>• the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving</li> </ul>

	<p>its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals;</li> <li>• the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined;</li> <li>• the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability;</li> <li>• the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted;</li> <li>• the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and</li> <li>• the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2D</b></p> <p><b>Board Oversight</b></p>	<p><b>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school;</li> <li>• the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight;</li> <li>• the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders;</li> <li>• the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity;</li> <li>• the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance;</li> <li>• where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion;</li> <li>• the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and</li> <li>• the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2E</b></p> <p><b>Governance</b></p>	<p><b>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities;</li> </ul>

- the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity;
- the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter;
- the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner;
- the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints;
- the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies;
- the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and
- the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

## **APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Charter Schools and the State University of New York**

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts, schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case, the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees, which is directly responsible for school performance. While independent, public charter schools and their boards, like traditional public schools and school boards, are subject to oversight and monitoring. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its Accountability Plan as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness within the charter period, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

### **The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits**

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of

years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be in its fifth year of instruction and facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and report, which all schools in that position receive. As such, each of the Institute's evaluation reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program, but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit ("the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks"). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1.B—1.H) to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the focus on these academic benchmarks is important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's 3<sup>rd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing, but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, and particularly at the time of the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1A, the school's progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the academic benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

### **Keeping This Report in Context**

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State

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<sup>4</sup> More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

University Trustees and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are valid, in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school's academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the evaluation team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the evaluation team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed *brutal honesty* is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.