



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Initial Renewal Report

Harlem Link Charter School

January 4, 2010

Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277
518/427-6510 (fax)
www.newyorkcharters.org

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The final version of Institute renewal reports should be broadly shared by the school with the entire school community. This report will be posted on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm.

REPORT INTRODUCTION

This report is the primary means by which the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) transmits to the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “SUNY Trustees”) its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s application for renewal, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “SUNY Renewal Practices”).¹

Information about the State University’s renewal process, including the Institute’s comprehensive Charter Renewal Handbook and an overview of the requirements for renewal under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended, the “Act”), are available on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.

RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Recommendation

Short-Term Renewal

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve the Application for Renewal of Harlem Link Charter School and renew its charter for a period of three years with authority to provide instruction to students in Kindergarten through 5th grade in such configuration as set forth in its Application for Renewal, with a maximum projected enrollment of 320 students.

Background and Required Findings

In initial renewal reviews, the SUNY Trustees evaluate the strength and effectiveness of a school’s academic program by the degree to which the school has succeeded in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period² and by the quality of the instructional program in place at the school during the charter period, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks (a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks). In giving weight to both student achievement and the emergent program, this approach provides a balance between an outcome-based system of accountability in which a school is held accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results and a determination of the likelihood that the educational program will improve student learning and achievement going forward.

Harlem Link Charter School (“Harlem Link”) has applied for an Initial, Full-Term Renewal of five years. The SUNY Renewal Practices provide three possible renewal outcomes for Harlem Link: Full-Term Renewal; Short-Term Renewal; or Non-Renewal. In order to earn a Short-Term Renewal, Harlem Link must in brief either have compiled: 1) an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement but have in place an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness which will likely result in the school’s being able to meet its academic Accountability Plan goals with the

¹ The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised September 15, 2009) are available at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalPractices.doc>.

² For the purpose of reporting student achievement results, the Accountability Period is defined in the SUNY Renewal Practices as the time the Accountability Plan was in effect. In the case of an Initial Renewal, the plan covers the first four years that the school was in operation during the charter period.

additional time that renewal would permit; or 2) an overall record of meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals but have in place an educational program that is inadequate in multiple and material respects.³

Based on the Institute's review of the evidence it gathered and Harlem Link provided including, but not limited to, the school's Application for Renewal, evaluation visits conducted during the charter period, a renewal evaluation visit conducted in the last year of the charter period, and the school's record of academic performance as determined by the extent to which it has met the academic goals in its Accountability Plan, the Institute finds that the school has compiled an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals, but has in place (a) an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, that will likely result in the school's being able to meet or come close to meeting those goals with the additional time that renewal would permit, and (b) a governing board and organizational structures that have demonstrated the capacity to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals and to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound fashion.

Based on all the evidence, the Institute makes the following findings required by the Act. Harlem Link Charter School as described in the Application for Renewal meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner in the next charter period. Finally, given the programs it will offer, its structure and its purpose, approving the school to operate for another three years is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2).

Therefore, in accordance with the standard for Initial Renewal found in the SUNY Renewal Practices, the Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve Harlem Link Charter School's Application for Charter Renewal and renew the charter for a period of three years.

Consideration of School District Comments

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the school district in which the charter school is located regarding the school's application for renewal. As of the date of this report, no comments were received in response.

Summary Discussion

Harlem Link Charter School meets the standards for a Short-Term Renewal of three years to the extent that it has accumulated a limited and mixed record of achievement, based on two years of state assessment data for two grades, but has over the course of the charter, and in particular late in the charter period, made significant progress in the establishment of an effective educational program. Harlem Link does *not* meet the standard for a five-year renewal because it has not compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals; nor has it established an educational program that is particularly strong and effective, considering the ongoing implementation of structures and systems that have only recently been put in place. With the development and revision of its curriculum, support for its teaching staff, and clear organizational priorities, the school is likely to meet or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals with the additional

³ See the SUNY Renewal Practices for a full explanation of both short-term renewal options.

time that a Short-Term Renewal of three years would permit. Further, the school's governing board has demonstrated the capacity to meet the school's academic goals and to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound fashion.

Academic Success

Having administered state exams for the first time in 2007-08, Harlem Link's record of student achievement is based on limited data. The school is making progress toward meeting the English language arts goal in its Accountability Plan and is close to meeting its mathematics goal (after meeting the mathematics goal in 2007-08, Harlem Link's results declined in 2008-09). Based on limited data, the school has met its science goal during the Accountability Period. As the school did not enroll students in the grade in which social studies is tested during the Accountability Period, the social studies goal does not yet apply. According to the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system, the school is deemed to be in good standing.

Through the two years of the Accountability Period, Harlem Link Charter School has improved its performance on the state's English language arts exam. In the third year of its charter when the school first enrolled students in tested grades, the school outperformed its local community school district; however, the school fell short of meeting its absolute performance target and performed about the same as expected in comparison to demographically similar schools. Since then, the school has improved its absolute and relative performance,⁴ outperformed its local community school district, and shown year-to-year growth in its lone grade-level student cohort.

During its initial charter term, Harlem Link has posted strong 3rd grade results on the state mathematics test, but overall performance declined in the most recent year. In 2007-08, when the school first enrolled students in a tested grade, the school achieved its absolute target and outperformed its local community school district and demographically similar schools statewide. In the most recent year, although the school continued to exceed its absolute target and again outperformed the local community school district, its absolute performance declined.⁵ Similarly, in comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, the school exceeded its predicted level of performance, but not sufficiently to exceed its Effect Size target. In terms of growth, in 2008-09, when two years of state test data first became available for growth analysis at Harlem Link, the 4th grade cohort's performance declined substantially.

Instructional leadership at Harlem Link has improved over the course of the charter period, resulting in ongoing and systematic support being provided to teachers. School leaders have in place a comprehensive system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness, including formal and informal observations and an individual goal-setting process. School leaders identify shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge and then provide targeted support and coaching to improve these deficiencies. School leaders are also adequately monitoring and

⁴ In interpreting a school's year-to-year changes in the absolute measure, the Institute puts the results in the context of overall state-wide changes. In general, the state-wide proficiency rate on the English language arts exam increased by five percent from 2006-07 to 2007-08 and by nine percent from 2007-08 to 2008-09. From a related perspective, the median school had a proficiency rate of 68.7 percent, 72.8 percent, and 80.9 percent during the three years respectively. These year-to-year changes suggest the importance of the comparative measures included in the goal.

⁵ In interpreting a school's year-to-year changes in the absolute measure, the Institute puts the results in the context of overall state-wide changes. In general, the statewide proficiency rate on the mathematics exam increased by nearly six percent from 2006-07 to 2007-08 and by eight percent from 2007-08 to 2008-09. From a related perspective, the median school had a proficiency rate of 79.5 percent, 86.2 percent, and 90.8 percent during the three years respectively. These year-to-year changes in absolute results suggest the importance of the comparative measures included in the goal.

evaluating the academic program, including regularly measuring overall school performance within specific programmatic areas, including those contained in students' Individualized Education Programs. This activity is in contrast to the school's first three years of operation, when "the system developed to evaluate teachers' practices was fragmented and inconsistent [and there was] no consistently effective system established for [school leaders] to observe teaching practices."⁶ Similarly, school leaders have set clear goals and priorities during the last two years of the charter period as opposed to the school's second year of operation when "it was not evident that the school's leadership had set clear priorities or expectations for curriculum, instruction, and assessment,"⁷ which at that time caused confusion within the staff.

In addition to its ongoing instructional leadership, the school has also developed a sustained and cohesive professional development program to assist teachers in meeting student academic needs. The school has devoted substantial resources to support a comprehensive program, including the use of external consultants as staff developers. These efforts contrast those of the early years of the school's operation, when the professional development program was "inadequate in meeting the needs of teachers."⁸

The school has in place a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. Harlem Link has regularly administered a wide range of standardized, formative, and summative assessments throughout the charter period and has recently established a clear and effective system to collect and analyze assessment data. While the school had relied on teachers early in the charter period to develop assessments with insufficient training, the school now has in place a process to ensure their reliability and validity. Teachers use action plans from assessment results to determine instructional groups and to identify students in need of academic support. In addition, school leaders adequately use assessment data to monitor, change, and improve the academic program, as well as supporting teachers in understanding and using this information. Finally, the school regularly communicates student progress and growth to parents/guardians and the school community.

Recently, Harlem Link has developed a clearly defined curriculum framework that is aligned to state learning standards. Early in the charter period, the school relied heavily on the teaching staff to develop and modify the written curriculum, resulting in lessons that were not "uniformly developed from grade to grade or classroom to classroom."⁹ The school has since put in place a clear and effective system for reviewing and revising the curriculum, which includes using assessment data to determine instructional gaps, while teachers are provided sufficient support in developing curriculum. In addition, school leaders regularly review lesson plans for consistency and alignment to the school's curriculum, a positive change from past practices. Teachers have access to guiding curricular documents, such as scope and sequence, pacing charts, and rubrics that guide the development of their lesson plans. The result of the school's efforts to construct and implement a comprehensive curriculum, along with the development of the assessment system described above is likely to contribute to the school meeting the key academic goals in its Accountability Plan within the Short-Term Renewal period.

⁶ Evidence contained in the school's Third-Year External Evaluation Report

⁷ Evidence contained in the school's Second-Year Evaluation Report

⁸ Evidence contained in the school's Third-Year External Evaluation Report

⁹ Evidence contained in the school's Second-Year Evaluation Report

The learning environment at Harlem Link has improved significantly over the course of the charter period. The school environment was unsafe in Harlem Link's first year of operation and other significant deficiencies in the school's academic program were attributable to a great extent to the absence of a coherent discipline program. The school appropriately identified student order and discipline as a priority for its second year of operation and developed a school-wide system for managing student behavior. The school struggled to implement this system with uniformity in all classrooms in its third year of operation, but has since made progress in this area. While the quality of classroom management continues to vary throughout the school, and some low level misbehavior is tolerated, the specific steps that school leaders have taken over the course of the charter period have resulted in a safe and orderly environment throughout the school.

Teachers at Harlem Link demonstrate competency in the subjects and grade levels they teach. The school has improved the clarity of expectations for teachers in delivering the co-teaching model of instruction specified in its charter. Classroom instruction at the school generally lacked academic rigor early in the charter period; however since then there has been improvement in instruction; however, many students were not cognitively engaged and the use of instructional time was not always maximized. Nevertheless, teachers generally plan and deliver purposeful lessons and the school has been successful in differentiating instruction to meet a range of learning needs represented in the school's student population. These improvements, as well as the school's support for teachers, and the development of coherent curriculum and assessment systems, suggest that the rigor of instruction is likely to improve during the next charter period.

The school deploys sufficient resources and personnel to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs. Harlem Link has clear screening procedures for identifying students with disabilities and those at risk of academic failure, consisting of a multi-tiered intervention system that documents the performance of identified students. Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) classrooms are the primary means by which the school meets the needs of students with Individualized Education Programs. In addition, the school's co-teaching model is effectively used to differentiate instruction and therefore serves as an adequate intervention strategy. The school uses a home language survey and assessments to determine if students are English language learners, and those identified as such are served through a sheltered English approach. Finally, school leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the performance of students that receive intervention services as well as the intervention services as a whole.

Organizational Effectiveness and Viability

School stakeholders are aware of and committed to the school's mission. In keeping with the school's name and philosophy, the school board continues to seek community representation. In addition, school leaders have taken deliberate steps to build positive relationships within their community. Having moved to a new district, representatives from the school regularly attend Community School District 3 Community Education Council (CEC) meetings, and local CEC and PTA members have visited the school. The school has implemented many of the key design elements contained in its charter in pursuit of its mission, including the development of relationships with community-based organizations, fieldwork to support the instructional program, data-driven instruction and the school's co-teaching model.

Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school. The school has a process for evaluating parent satisfaction with the school, namely the New York City Department of Education annual survey. The 2008-09 survey results indicate parents were satisfied with all aspects of the school.

Parent involvement is a priority at Harlem Link. Parents have been included in the school's strategic planning retreat and the school improvement plan includes specific goals for parent involvement. The school's parent coordinator has created a community action group to address parent concerns by forming an advocacy committee comprised of six parents who represent the school in the community. Students interviewed during the renewal visit described a safe but structured learning environment. Students noted the school's personalized attention and felt there was a sense of community at the school.

The school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving its priorities. Seeking to address the absence of clear school-wide priorities in the initial years of the charter period, the school undertook a deliberate and inclusive process to develop a strategic plan (Link Improvement Plan or "LIP"). This plan was created with the assistance of an external consulting firm and utilized a board retreat that included parents, staff, and other stakeholders in order to facilitate the creation of goals. Consensus was reached on a set of clear and measurable priorities; action plans were created; and responsibility for monitoring progress was established. The school has implemented a process for the regular review of the goals and interim benchmarks included in the LIP. At the time of the renewal visit, interviewed staff members indicated that school priorities are now clearer, which has created a greater sense of focus throughout the school.

Day-to-day operations at the school are effectively managed. Additional staff positions, established late in the charter period and dedicated to the management of school operations have enabled instructional leaders to spend more time in assisting teachers. The school has also been effective in building relationships with members of the external school community. School leaders regularly participate in building council meetings, which are comprised of representatives of Harlem Link and the other three public schools that share the same facility.

The school has faced facility-related challenges throughout the charter term, yet has adequately managed the difficulties that have resulted from multiple relocations and sites. Prior to the current school year, when Harlem Link was located in two sites, the school successfully managed its third facility move, which resulted in a single site for the school's lower and upper grades. The provision of a single facility space has been a significant improvement for the school. Further, the school has maintained adequate enrollment throughout the charter period, noteworthy given the number of times it has relocated.

The school has generally hired and retained quality personnel. While teacher turnover was a concern in the early years of operation, only two of 26 teachers did not return from the previous year, and half of the teacher teams have worked together for more than two years. The stability of the school's teaching staff is likely a result in part of the development of an organizational structure that supports distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. As the school has grown throughout the charter period, administrative staff have been added to provide effective supervision and support of the school's various functions.

The Harlem Link Charter School Board of Trustees has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide oversight of the school. The school board conducts its oversight responsibilities through a committee structure, including executive, finance and facilities, education, development, as well as an ad hoc search committee when needed. The school board receives regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability, and organizational capacity that allow it to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.

Throughout most of the charter period, the board had not formally evaluated the school leadership or the academic program as a whole. Late in the charter period, the board recognized that a deficiency in carrying out its roles and responsibilities was not setting sufficient goals for the co-directors. As such, the board has set additional goals for the co-directors and has allocated resources to assist them in their accomplishment. The board has also provided the school leaders with substantial support by continuing to retain a consulting firm to coach them. Recently, with the advice of the consulting firm, the board began actively evaluating the performance of the school leaders, focusing on student achievement and working toward meeting Accountability Plan goals. One likely contribution to the improvement in the board's performance is its deliberate decision to seek board training and development opportunities, which it plans to continue during the course of the next charter period. These actions, along with the board's self-reflection and pro-active approach to governance provide evidence that it has the capacity to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound fashion.

The school board appeared to be following its election cycles for staggered trustee terms. At the time of the renewal visit (and when the board was first formed) the chairperson of the school board was also acting as the interim treasurer. However, the board had identified a new member to take on the treasurer role pending Institute approval. The school board appeared to be guarding against and managing conflicts of interest effectively.

In terms of legal compliance issues, Harlem Link experienced a challenging start, but at the time of the renewal visit had improved significantly. For example, the school had difficulty with teacher certification issues as part of its initial opening review in 2005; the State Education Department noted problems with teacher certification in 2006 and in May 2007 the Institute placed the school on a corrective plan due to this issue. However, by the time of the renewal visit, the school's teacher certification status had made improvements. One indicator of the school's improvement in addressing compliance issues is the number of formal and informal complaints about the school that reach the Institute. Initially, several complaints were received by the Institute but by the end of the charter term no complaints were noted. A similar pattern seemed to emerge in some early deficiencies in policies and procedures that were remedied by the time of the renewal visit. That being said, a number of largely minor policy deficiencies were noted at the time of the renewal visit. With the exceptions noted above, Harlem Link was at the time of the renewal inspection in general and substantial compliance with the terms of its charter, the Charter Schools Act, and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations.

Fiscal Soundness

Harlem Link has created realistic budgets over the course of the charter period that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Annual budgets are developed by the director of operations with appropriate input from the school's principal, finance committee and other members of the school board. Budget variances are routinely analyzed by the director of operations and material variances are discussed with the principal, other key school staff, the finance committee and the board. Actual expenses have been equal to, or less than, actual revenue over the course of the charter period with no material exceptions.

The school has maintained appropriate written fiscal policies and procedures related to external and internal compliance for cash disbursements, cash receipts, bank reconciliations, payroll, fixed assets, grants/contributions, and the preparation of financial statements. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management's direction. The director of operations works with the school's principal and management team, along with the school board to

ensure that the policies and procedures are documented and followed by school staff. The school's fiscal year ("FY") FY 2008-09 audit report on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants disclosed no material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of other deficiencies in the reports provides some, but not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures.

The school has complied with financial reporting requirements during the charter period. Budget, quarterly and annual financial statement audit reports were filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner. Each of the school's annual financial statement audit reports followed generally accepted accounting principles and received an unqualified opinion, indicating that, in the auditor's opinion, the school's financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the school's financial position, changes in net assets, and cash flows. The reports indicate that the audits were conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards as required.

The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. The school completed FY 2008-09 in stable financial condition and has continued to increase slightly both total net assets and cash reserves in each year of the school's initial charter term while keeping liabilities fairly low. The school has no short or long term debt. The school has a positive working capital ratio, indicating the school has enough short term assets to cover immediate liabilities/short term debt. The school has no major investments and all cash is left in savings and money market accounts to ensure the school has sufficient cash available to pay current bills and other payables that are shortly due.

Plans for the Next Charter Period

The school has provided all of the key structural elements for a new school charter and they are deemed to be reasonable, feasible and achievable. The school would maintain its current mission statement:

Harlem Link Charter School, a K – 5 public school, links academics, values and community to graduate articulate scholars who will meet or exceed New York State Performance Standards and active citizens who learn and serve in their communities. Families, staff and community join together to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that empowers students to take an active role in their learning and demonstrate good character.

The original charter application envisioned instruction through the eighth grade. However, the school has not requested such an expansion in its Application for Renewal, citing the magnitude of challenges the school faced in reaching its current level of stability and because of the difficulties caused by continual expansion. Therefore, the school would continue to provide instruction in kindergarten through 5th grade during the next charter period. Total maximum enrollment would continue to be 320 students each year. The school calendar would generally continue to follow that of the New York City Department of Education with no fewer than 190 instructional days each year.

The school proposes to make minor changes to the educational program. Second Step, a violence prevention program introduced in the final year of the current charter period, would continue to be implemented to support the social and emotional needs of students. Friends and Family Fridays would provide for students a seminar-format of instruction on Fridays and involve teachers, administrators, support staff, and at times parents, in delivering approved programs. It is intended to encourage stakeholder participation in school activities and support for the school's Core Value of 'Wonder.'

The school proposes to meet its mission by implementing the following key design elements during the term of the next charter: rigorous, high-expectations and a belief in students; data-driven curriculum and pedagogy that support the school's mission; high levels of professional development; family and community involvement strategies; and a supportive school culture.

Members of the Harlem Link Board of Trustees expressed the intent to continue their service to the school and have not proposed significant changes to the school's governance structure. The board would continue to be comprised of individuals who fit the matrix of skills described in the school's original charter, including the areas of business and finance, community relations, education, fundraising and marketing, governance, human resources, law, non-profit management, organizational leadership and real estate. The school has created a New Trustee Orientation Protocol and Trustee Handbook, as it plans on adding additional members to its existing board. The board has the requisite skills sets and understanding of its roles and responsibilities in order to adequately govern the school during the term of the next charter.

Harlem Link has presented a reasonable and feasible fiscal plan for the next charter period that is likely achievable. The school has developed an adequate budget for term of the next charter using conservative assumptions when budgeting revenue. If enrollment goals are met, the school is projecting a minor net surplus in each year of the Short-Term Renewal period. The school has assumed a two-percent increase in per pupil funding in each year of the plan, which contributes to the surplus in cash each year. The school acknowledges that this percentage increase is not assured and has developed a contingency budget accordingly. It should also be noted that the school has annually budgeted for only 96 percent of projected actual enrollment to account for any negative fluctuation in enrollment during the year. The plan provides ample support to the school's programmatic and staffing needs. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, laws and state funding.

The school currently occupies facility space provided by the New York City Department of Education. School leaders and the board are confident that they will continue to be granted such space, yet also realize that this space may not always be available. They remain optimistic that through continued fiscal management along with increased fundraising efforts the school will be able to obtain its own space when it becomes necessary. School leaders and the school board are working diligently to obtain corporate donations and to build a capital campaign that would eventually assist in the acquisition of a building.

Harlem Link Charter School has presented a plan for implementing an educational program during the period of the proposed Short-Term Renewal that would contribute to its meeting the goals contained in its Accountability Plan. Its governing board has demonstrated the capacity and instituted the organizational processes and structures to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound fashion. With the continued implementation of its strategic plan, focus on student outcomes, and instructional support for teachers, the school's leadership is likely to guide the school in enabling students to achieve in all grades and in meeting or coming close to meeting the goals in its Accountability Plan that the additional time a Short-Term Renewal period would permit.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	June 22, 2004
Date Initial Charter Approved by Board of Regents	September 10, 2004
School Opening Date	September 6, 2005

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2005-06 - 2006-07	134 W 122 nd St., New York, NY	All	New York City Community School District 3
2007-08	134 W 122 nd St., New York, NY 425 W 130 th St., New York, NY	1-3 K	New York City Community School District 3 and 5
2008-09	134 W 122 nd St., New York, NY 425 W 130 th St., New York, NY	2-4 K-1	New York City Community School District 3 and 5
2009-10	20 W 112 th St., New York, NY	All	New York City Community School District 3

Current Mission Statement

Harlem Link Charter School, a K-5 public school, links academics, values and community to graduate articulate scholars who will meet or exceed New York State Performance Standards and active citizens who learn and serve in their communities. Families, staff and community join together to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that empowers students to take an active role in their learning and demonstrate good character.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rigorous expectations and a belief in all students;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data-driven instruction;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended school year and day;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structured academic programs, including “fieldwork”;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high levels of professional development;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • co-teaching model;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong connections to community-based organizations for the arts;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a “focus” period, specifically designed for individualized or small-group instruction based on children’s academic needs;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family and community involvement; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a supportive school culture.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹⁰	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2005-06	108	N/A	101	K-1	K-1	196
2006-07	162	N/A	162	K-2	K-2	190
2007-08	216	N/A	195	K-3	K-3	190
2008-09	270	N/A	262	K-4	K-4	189
2009-10	324	N/A	310	K-5	K-5	190

Student Demographics

	2006-07 ¹¹		2007-08 ¹²		2008-09	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 4 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 4 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment ¹³	Percent of NYC CSD 4 Enrollment ¹⁴
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	N/A
Black or African American	81%	33%	80%	32%	80%	N/A
Hispanic	19%	62%	20%	62%	18%	
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	3%	0%	4%	0%	N/A
White	0%	20%	0%	2%	0%	N/A
Multiracial	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	N/A
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities ¹⁵	9%	N/A	10%	N/A	11%	N/A
Limited English Proficient	1%	12%	1%	13%	2%	N/A
Free/Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	69%	77%	71%	74%	N/A	N/A
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	14%	5%	16%	6%	N/A	N/A

¹⁰ Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

¹¹ Source: 2006-07 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

¹² Source: 2007-08 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

¹³ Source: 2008-09 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools. It also does not include Free/Reduced Lunch status, but rather categorizes students as "economically disadvantaged." Harlem Link has 72% of students that fall into this category.

¹⁴ Aggregated district data not yet available for 2008-09.

¹⁵ New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is school-reported from charter renewal applications. District data not available for NYC CSD 4.

Current Board of Trustees¹⁶

Board Member Name	Term	Position/Committees
Jonathan Barrett	2008-2011	Chairman and Acting Treasurer
David W. Brown	2009-2012	Secretary
B. Peter Carry	2009-2012	Trustee
Sean Coar	2009-2012	Trustee
Steven Evangelista	N/A	Ex Officio
Rachel Field	2009-2012	Trustee
John Reddick	2008-2011	Trustee
Margaret Ryan	N/A	Ex Officio
Kesha Young	2007-2010	Trustee

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2005-06 - 2009-10	Steven Evangelista, Co-Director for Operations Margaret Ryan, Co-Director for Instruction

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2005-06	First-Year Visit	Institute	March 15, 2006
2006-07	Second-Year Visit	Institute	March 13, 2007
2007-08	Third-Year Visit	External (RMC Research)	April 16-17, 2008
2008-09	Fourth-Year Visit	Institute	March 24, 2009
2009-10	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	October 27-29, 2009

¹⁶ Source: Application for Renewal

ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Background

At the beginning of the charter period the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. The plan also included an NCLB goal. For each goal in the Accountability Plan specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. Furthermore, the Institute has established a set of required outcome measures that include the following three types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the growth in student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of grade level cohorts. The following table shows the outcome measures currently required by the Institute in each subject area goal, as well as for the NCLB goal. Schools may have also elected to include additional optional goals and measures in their Accountability Plan.

Summary of Required Goals and Outcome Measures in Elementary/Middle School (K-8) Accountability Plans					
GOAL	Required Outcome Measures				
	Absolute		Comparative		Growth
	75 percent proficient on state exam	Performance Index (PI) meets Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)	Percent proficient greater than that of local school district	School exceeds predicted level of performance compared to similar public schools by small Effect Size	Grade-level cohorts reduce by half the gap between prior year's percent proficient and 75 percent
English Language Arts	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Mathematics	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Science	✦		✦		
Social Studies	✦		✦		
NCLB	School is deemed in "Good Standing" under state's NCLB accountability system				

The most important criterion for renewal is academic success, which is demonstrated in large part by meeting or coming close to meeting the goals in a school's Accountability Plan. The Institute determines the outcome of a goal by evaluating the multiple measures associated with that goal.

The following presentation indicates the outcome of each of the school's goals, as well as an analysis of the respective measures for each goal during the Accountability Period.¹⁷ *Italicized text indicates*

¹⁷ Because the renewal decision is made in the last year of a charter period, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the charter period. For Initial Renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the Charter Period. For

goals or measures as written in the school’s Accountability Plan; bold numbers appearing in the tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was achieved in a given year. Aside from required Accountability Plan measures, the following also presents the results of optional measures that the school may have included in its plan.

English Language Arts

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

Outcome: Harlem Link is close to meeting its English language arts goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Grade	2005-06¹⁸	2006-07	2007-08 (Tested: 36)	2008-09 (Tested: 76)
3	-	-	58.3	73.7
4	-	-	-	73.7
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	-	58.3	73.7

In 2007-08, when Harlem Link first enrolled students in tested grades, 58 percent of 3rd grade students were proficient on the state’s English language arts exam and the school fell well short of its 75 percent target. In 2008-09, when 74 percent of 3rd and 4th graders were proficient, the school almost achieved its target.

Absolute Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06¹⁹	2006-07	2007-08 (Tested: 50)	2008-09 (Tested: 104)
PI	-	-	160	170
AMO	122	122	133	144

Subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter period through the next to last year of the current charter period.

¹⁸ In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8. Prior to that, the exams in these subjects were administered only in grades 4 and 8.

¹⁹ In 2005-06 English language arts and mathematics testing began in grades 3-8, and the Performance Index was henceforth calculated based on the aggregate of all tested students.

Harlem Link Charter School has surpassed the English language arts Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) established by the state's NCLB accountability system during the two years of its Accountability Period in which the school had state testing grades.

Comparative Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 (Grade 3)	2008-09 (Grades 3-4)
School	-	-	58.3	73.7
District	-	-	43.1	54.7

Harlem Link Charter School has outperformed the local community school district on the state's English language arts exam during both years of the Accountability Period.

Comparative Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 (Grade 3) (Tested: 50)	2008-09 (Grade 3-4) (Tested: 104)
Predicted	-	-	57.5	66.3
Actual	-	-	60.0	70.2
Effect Size	-	-	0.19	0.27

In 2007-08, in comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, Harlem Link performed about the same as expected and fell short of its 0.3 Effect Size target. In 2008-09, the school improved its relative performance, posting an Effect Size of 0.27, and approached its target.

Growth Measure: 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.				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Percent Level 3 & 4	2005-06	2006-07²⁰	2007-08	2008-09 (Grade 4) (N=36)
Baseline	-	-	-	66.7
Target	-	-	-	70.8
Actual	-	-	-	72.2
Cohorts Made Target	-	-	-	(1 of 1)

²⁰ New York State began administering English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8 in 2005-06, thus year-to-year growth could not be evaluated until 2006-07 when two years' of results were first available.

In 2008-09, when two years of state testing data first became available for growth analysis, Harlem Link's only cohort achieved its target and overall performance improved.

Mathematics

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

Outcome: Harlem Link is close to meeting its mathematics goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: 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.				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Grade	2005-06²¹	2006-07	2007-08 (Tested: 36)	2008-09 (Tested: 76)
3	-	-	94.4	100.0
4	-	-	-	78.9
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	-	94.4	89.5

In 2007-08, when the Harlem Link first enrolled students in tested grades, 94 percent of 3rd grade students were proficient and the school far exceeded its 75 percent target. In 2008-09, when both 3rd and 4th graders were tested, overall performance declined, and 90 percent of students were proficient.

Absolute Measure: 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.				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06²²	2006-07	2007-08 (Tested: 53)	2008-09 (Tested: 107)
PI	-	-	194	186
AMO	86	86	102	119

Harlem Link Charter School has far surpassed the mathematics Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) established by the state's NCLB accountability system during the two years of its Accountability Period in which the school had state testing grades.

²¹ In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8. Prior to that, the exams in these subjects were administered only in grades 4 and 8.

²² In 2005-06 English language arts and mathematics testing began in grades 3-8, and the Performance Index was henceforth calculated based on the aggregate of all tested students.

Comparative Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06 (Grades)	2006-07 (Grades)	2007-08 (Grade 3)	2008-09 (Grades 3-4)
School	-	-	94.4	89.5
District	-	-	76.1	75.2

Harlem Link Charter School has outperformed the local community school district on the state mathematics exam during both years of the Accountability Period. In the most recent year, the school's proficiency rate exceeded that of the district by nearly 15 percentage points.

Comparative Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 (Grade 3) (Tested: 53)	2008-09 (Grades 3-4) (Tested: 107)
Predicted	-	-	84.6	85.8
Actual	-	-	94.3	86.9
Effect Size	-	-	0.86	0.23

In 2007-08, in comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Harlem Link performed better than expected to a large degree and the school exceeded its 0.3 Effect Size target. In 2008-09, the school's relative performance declined, with an Effect Size of 0.23 that fell short of its target.

Growth Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Mean NCE	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09 (Grade 4) (N=39)
Baseline	-	-	-	94.9
Target	-	-	-	95.0
Actual	-	-	-	76.9
Cohorts Made	-	-	-	(0 of 1)
Target	-	-	-	(0 of 1)

In 2008-09, when two years of state testing data first became available for growth analysis, Harlem Link's 4th grade cohort failed to achieve its target and overall performance declined substantially.

Science

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

Outcome: Based on the limited data available, the school met its science goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>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.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
School Year				
Grade	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09 (Tested: 35)
4	-	-	-	91.4
8	-	-	-	-

In 2008-09, when Harlem Link first enrolled students in tested grades, 91 percent of tested 4th graders were proficient on the state science test and the school far surpassed its 75 percent target.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on a State science exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local school district.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
School Year				
Comparison	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09 (Grade 4)
School	-	-	-	91.4
District	-	52.0	55.0	NA

While comparative data for the most recent year are yet unavailable, Harlem Link's high level of performance on the state science exceeds the district's performance in each of the two previous years. Assuming district performance remained level in the current year, Harlem Link will have achieved its target.

Social Studies

As the school did not enroll students in tested grades during the Accountability Period, this goal is not applicable.

NCLB

In addition to meeting its specific subject area goals, the school is expected under No Child Left Behind to make adequate yearly progress towards enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state English language arts and mathematics exams. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues an annual school accountability report that indicates the school's status each year.

Accountability Plan Goal: Under the state’s NCLB accountability system, the school’s Accountability Status will be “Good Standing” each year.

Outcome: The school met the goal. Harlem Link was deemed to be in good standing in each of the four years of the Accountability Period.

Absolute Measure: <i>Under the state’s NCLB accountability system, the school’s Accountability Status will be “Good Standing” each year.</i>				
Results				
Status	School Year			
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Good Standing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Analysis of Additional Evidence

Harlem Link Charter School received a letter grade of "F" on its 2007-08 New York City Department of Education (DOE) Progress Report. According to the DOE, overall Progress Report scores are based on school performance in three categories: School Environment, Student Performance and Student Progress, with the greatest emphasis placed on Student Progress. New York City District schools and charter schools authorized by the New York City Department of Education that receive As and Bs are eligible for rewards while schools that get Ds and Fs, or Cs over three years in a row, face possible consequences.

Consistent with the data presented for the Accountability Plan measures in English language arts and mathematics above, Harlem Link received the lowest possible score for Student Growth on its DOE Progress Report and the second highest grade for Student Performance. The low mark in Student Growth reflects the decline in year-to-year proficiency for the school’s lone cohort on the state mathematics exam and only slight increase in proficiency on the state English language arts exam from 2007-08 to 2008-09. With regard to Student Performance, the school’s absolute proficiency rates on English language arts and mathematics exams placed it just above the mean in relation to demographically similar schools city-wide. However, given that Student Growth accounts for 60 percent of the overall DOE Progress Report letter grade while Student Performance accounts for only 25 percent, Harlem Link’s overall letter grade was biased heavily downward as a result.