



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE
AS TO THE APPLICATION
FOR CHARTER RENEWAL OF
THE KING CENTER CHARTER SCHOOL**

FEBRUARY 22, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 (the “Act”) authorizes the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “Board of Trustees”) to grant charters for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools. Charter schools provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.¹

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

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

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

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

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

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

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.³

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

As a charter authorizing entity, the Board of Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings:

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner; and
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.⁵

Where the Board of Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.⁶ The Regents may approve or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation. In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the initial charter expires. In the latter case (return to the Board of Trustees), the Board of Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the Board of Trustees resubmit the

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

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

⁵ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁶ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law.⁷

Process for Renewal

While that renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan")⁸ setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").⁹ This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures. Reports and de-briefings for the school's Board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute provides general advice as to potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

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

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?

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

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

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

- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

The application is reviewed by Institute staff. The staff also conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This audit includes examination of the school's charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and Board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examines audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, a lead member of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete (professional development plans, special education plans, school newsletters, *etc.*). Renewal visit team members visit classes, observe lessons, examine student work, sit in on school meetings, interview staff members and speak informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's Board of Trustees and administrators.

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of benchmarks that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the Accountability Plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.¹⁰

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team finalizes the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks are discussed and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark. The completed benchmarks present a focus for discussion and a summary of the findings. The benchmarks are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support but do not individually or in limited combination provide the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation.

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

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

READER'S GUIDE

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

1. Recommendations and Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Finding and Discussion

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

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

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

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

3. Renewal Benchmarks

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

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The King Center Charter School (King Center or KCCS), named after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was approved by the State University Board of Trustees in January 2000 and by the Board of Regents in April. It opened in the fall of that year. The school is located in the former St. Mary of Sorrows Church, now an historic landmark at 938 Genesee Street, Buffalo, New York, in Buffalo's economically distressed East Side, which was designated a federal Enterprise Zone Community in 1994. The school was founded by Dr. Claity Massey, an early childhood educator affiliated with the King Urban Life Center, a social service and community organization that grew out of an effort to save the former St. Mary of Sorrows Church from demolition in the mid 1980's. It currently serves 105 students in grades Kindergarten through four for the 2004-05 school year.

The mission of the King Center Charter School is as follows:

The King Center Charter School provides a viable alternative to traditional education in a bright, colorful, open space where children utilize a year-round calendar to engage in individualized, technology rich learning experiences. Key elements to the success of the program include institutional accountability for outcomes, educational research supported through a distance technology link to area colleges and universities, and a commitment to meaningful parent involvement.

The King Center Charter School is committed to improving student learning and achievement of students who are at-risk of academic failure by providing a holistic model for development during the early childhood years, based on Howard Gardner's principles of Multiple Intelligences, with multi-age classrooms and individualized programs for students. Relying on research that shows students lose ground over prolonged school breaks, the school utilizes year-round teaching, with no break longer than three weeks. Experts from the health and higher education communities and practitioners from a wider array of organizations and agencies serving the Buffalo East Side are participating with the King Center Director and teachers in the development, implementation and formative evaluation of the model.

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation: The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for charter renewal submitted by the King Center Charter School and that it authorize the short-term renewal of the charter for the King Center Charter School through and including July 31, 2007, with authority limited, however, to providing instruction in grades Kindergarten through four with a maximum enrollment of 105 students and consistent with the other terms of operation set forth in its application for renewal.

Summary Discussion

The King Center Charter School is located in Buffalo, New York and serves students in grades Kindergarten through four with a present enrollment of approximately 105 students. The school has applied to the State University Board of Trustees for a full-term charter of five years; in the alternative it has sought a short-term renewal for a period of not less than two years. The school seeks to double its current enrollment over the course of the next five years.

In order for the Charter Schools Institute to recommend that a charter school authorized by the State University Board of Trustees be awarded a five-year renewal of its charter, a school must show that it has met its Accountability Plan measures and goals or at least made consistent and meaningful progress towards meeting those outcome measures and goals. It must also demonstrate that it is, at the time of renewal, a fiscally and organizationally sound entity and meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law.

In order for a charter school to qualify for short-term renewal, the school must be able to present student assessment data that, at the very least, presents a mixed record of academic success. In addition, the school at the time of renewal must have in place the personnel, programs and structures, such that, if the school were allowed more time to operate, the school would be likely in that time to produce improvements in student achievement and meet its Accountability Plan measures and goals, or at the very least make significant and consistent progress towards them.

Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, the Institute has determined that King Center has met the standard for short-term renewal and therefore recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the school's application for such renewal and authorize renewal of the charter until July 31, 2007.¹¹

As set forth in detail in the findings and benchmarks, over the first four years of the charter, King Center has had mixed success in meeting key academic outcomes. Over the life of the charter, the school has generally not met the critical English Language Arts (ELA) outcomes, the

¹¹As the school's current charter term expires during the last quarter of a school year, on April 4, 2005 (an artifact and result of when the school's charter was originally approved) the grant of the charter until July 31, 2007 effectively gives the school a two-year short-term renewal.

essential measures of basic literacy, it had set for itself. In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade New York State ELA examinations, King Center has had a low level of performance during each of the three years the test has been administered. In contrast to ELA, the school met all its math goals and has made progress toward meeting its science goals in 2003-04. The school is in good standing under No Child Left Behind. As a whole, the student achievement data compiled during its first four years of operation indicate that the school has had limited success in improving student learning and achievement.

However, at the time of the renewal visit, classroom practice reflected competent teaching and instructional strategies that engaged students. Teachers generally provided small group instruction effectively and efficiently. Teacher's classroom management was generally effective. Students were on-task the vast majority of instructional time. Teachers appeared to have well-planned activities with universally understood routines, and efficient transitions. Lessons were interesting, academically rigorous and age-appropriate. Teachers generally had a strong knowledge of the curriculum.

In its fifth year, the King Center has developed a clearly defined, quality curriculum in ELA. Teachers deliver the curriculum consistently based on the school's pacing and scope and sequence guides. As students have not taken standardized achievement tests since its implementation, hard data demonstrating its effectiveness is not yet available. On the other hand, the math curriculum has been demonstrably effective starting in the third year of the charter.

The school has developed a strong administrative capacity, but does not yet provide adequate centralized instructional leadership. The administrative team has mobilized a variety of coaches and mentors for the teachers through the life of the charter, but has not provided direct and coordinated instructional support themselves. Nor have they effectively coordinated oversight of instruction by these mentors and coaches. As such, King Center has yet to sustain day-to-day instructional supervision.

King Center has made significant improvements in its discipline program and classroom management practices. At the time of the visit, the renewal team found that the school promoted calm, safe classrooms where students participated fully in all learning activities. King Center has had an abiding interest in using data to improve its program; however, until the fifth year, its assessment instruments were either unreliable or not aligned with state standards, essentially precluding the possibility of using the assessment results for determining if students were achieving state standards.

During the life of the charter, the Board has mainly relied on reports from the school's Director as its chief means of providing oversight of the effectiveness of the school program. Despite critically low performance with, at best, incremental annual increases on the state ELA test, the Board took limited action, mostly focused on curriculum modification, and did not hold the Director accountable for results. Until recently, the Board had no formal process for evaluating the Director and, despite the low test scores, did not formally set out academic or other goals for her. This has changed to some degree between the fourth and fifth year.

In sum, despite the low ELA performance in the first four years, the school, largely as a result of its Reading First grant, appears to have a strong ELA program. As test results were not available at the time of the renewal visit, the effectiveness of the newly constituted ELA program could not yet be demonstrated with student achievement results. Nevertheless, the qualitative evidence at the time of the renewal visit suggests that the program was being well implemented. However, the qualitative evidence also indicates that the school organization is not prepared to support an expanding enrollment. It appears to need time to firmly establish its ELA program and to develop its instructional supervision in order to accommodate the possibility of an expanding teaching staff.

Accordingly, as set forth above, the Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approves King Center Charter School's application for a short-term renewal and authorize a renewal of its charter for a term to commence immediately upon expiration of the original term and to continue through and including July 31, 2007, limiting however the school's authority to provide instruction to grades Kindergarten through four with a maximum enrollment of 105 students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

- Finding 1: The King Center Charter School has had mixed success in meeting key academic outcomes. Over the life of the charter, the school has generally not met the critical English Language Arts (ELA) outcomes, the essential measures of basic literacy, it had set for itself. In 2003-04, the school met all its math goals and appears to have made substantial progress toward meeting its science goals.*
- Finding 2: With the resources of a Reading First grant, the school has developed a clearly defined, quality curriculum in ELA. Teachers deliver the curriculum consistently based on the school's pacing and scope and sequence guides.*
- Finding 3: With the resources afforded by the Reading First grant, King Center in its fifth year has developed a comprehensive assessment system which enables teachers to gauge the delivery of instruction and monitor student progress toward meeting the state standards. While the effectiveness of math assessment has been demonstrated, the effectiveness of this English Language Arts system has yet to be established.*
- Finding 4: King Center is well administered; however, it has not had the benefit of effective centralized instructional leadership.*
- Finding 5: The school has made significant improvements in its discipline program and classroom management practices. These efforts have resulted in an environment in which students generally come prepared to learn.*

The King Center Charter School has had mixed success in meeting key academic outcomes. Over the life of the charter, the school has generally not met the critical English Language Arts (ELA) outcomes, the essential measures of basic literacy, it had set for itself. In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade New York State examinations, King Center has not met the criterion of success set in its ELA outcome measure and has had a low-level of performance during each of the three years the test has been administered. In contrast to ELA, the school met all its math goals and has made progress toward meeting its science goals, in 2003-04.

With the resources of a Reading First grant, the school in its fifth year has developed a clearly defined, quality curriculum in ELA. Teachers deliver the curriculum consistently based on the school's pacing and scope and

sequence guides. As students have not taken standardized achievement tests since its implementation, hard data demonstrating its effectiveness is not yet available. On the other hand, the math curriculum has been demonstrably effective starting in the third year of the charter.

At the time of the renewal visit, classroom practice reflected competent teaching and instructional strategies that engaged students. Teachers generally provided small group instruction effectively and efficiently. With Reading First personnel and resources supporting small group instruction, the school is able to help students who are struggling academically to achieve. The school has developed a strong administrative capacity, but does not provide adequate centralized instructional leadership. The administrative team has mobilized a variety of coaches and mentors for the teachers through the life of the charter, but has not provided direct and coordinated instructional support themselves. Nor have they effectively coordinated oversight of instruction by these mentors and coaches. As such, King Center has lacked sustained day-to-day instructional supervision.

Teacher's classroom management was generally effective. Students were on-task the vast majority of instructional time. Teachers appeared to have well planned activities with universally understood routines, and efficient transitions. Lessons were interesting, academically rigorous and age-appropriate. Teachers generally had a strong knowledge of the curriculum.

King Center has had an abiding interest in using data to improve its program; however, until the fifth year, its assessment instruments were either unreliable or not aligned with state standards, essentially precluding the possibility of using the assessment results for determining if students were achieving state standards. While the school has made changes over the life of the charter in its instructional program, the changes were generally precipitated by results on the state's fourth grade examinations, and to some extent by the individually administered Woodcock Johnson Standardized achievement tests, but not by any other internal assessment data. With the resources afforded by the Reading First grant, King Center has developed a comprehensive assessment system that enables teachers to monitor student progress toward meeting the state standards.

King Center has made significant improvements in its discipline program and classroom management practices. At the time of the visit, the renewal team found that the school promoted calm, safe classrooms where students participated fully in all learning activities

2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

- Finding 1: During most of the charter period, King Center’s Board did not take the critical steps necessary to focus the school on meeting its student academic outcome measures and did not impose consequences when the school did not act with sufficient urgency. Some improvements in this regard are evident in the beginning of the school’s fifth year.*
- Finding 2: The Board has provided effective oversight for the operations and finances of the school. The administrative team has provided effective management of these aspects of the school.*
- Finding 3: The great majority of parents have indicated their satisfaction with the school. The school has met its accountability measures for parental participation.*
- Finding 4: Based on evidence gathered to date, the school is generally in substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, and the provisions in its charter.*

In general, all stakeholders are knowledgeable about the school’s mission and the methods the school uses to fulfill it. As with the charter, the school’s stakeholders are aware of, and can articulate, the key design elements of the school. With the exception of two elements, the school has generally implemented them.

During the life of the charter, the Board has mainly relied on reports from the school’s Director as its chief means of providing oversight of the effectiveness of the school program; however, as indicated above, until the fifth year, these assessments have been generally unreliable. Despite critically low performance with, at best, incremental annual increases on the state ELA test, the Board took limited action, mostly focused on curriculum modification, and did not hold the Director accountable for results. The Board’s response is particularly notable after the 2002-03 school year when it failed to act with appropriate urgency about continued low ELA performance. Until recently, the Board had no formal process for evaluating the Director and, despite the low test scores, did not formally set out academic or other goals for her. This has changed to some degree between the fourth and fifth year. While an evaluation instrument is now in place, Board members agreed that it was “a work in progress” and that it was still being refined.

Parents strongly support the King Center Charter School’s education of their children, as evidenced by the extent of their school volunteer work and attendance at parent-teacher conferences. With more than 90 percent of the parents responding to the annual parental survey, *no* response was

in the negative category. The school has maintained consistent enrollment and on average more than 85 percent of the students return each year. The waiting list at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year was substantial.

With exceptions in the areas of Freedom of Information Law and Open Meetings Law compliance, the performance of proper employee background checks pursuant to the Education Law, and minor charter compliance issues, the school's policies and procedures, other internal controls, Board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by Board members and school personnel demonstrate the school's general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law, its by-laws and the provisions of its charter.

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

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

Finding 2: Throughout the life of its charter, the school has consistently and in a timely fashion met its financial reporting requirements and maintained appropriate internal controls.

Finding 3: The school is in stable financial condition. It is solvent and has maintained adequate cash flow.

The Board has provided effective financial oversight and has posted evidence of making decisions that further the school's mission, program, and goals. The school operates pursuant to a long-range fiscal plan and has produced realistic budgets over the term of the charter.

The school has generally complied with financial reporting requirements and submitted annual financial statement audit reports with unqualified opinions indicating that the school's financial statements fairly represent its financial position. Reports have been complete and the school has followed generally accepted accounting principles.

The school is a viable entity from a purely financial perspective. The school completed FY 2004 in stable financial condition. Although the school's total net assets decreased by \$33,063, it finished with total net assets of \$290,185 (\$2,902 per approved enrolled student). The school has received negligible contributions to support its operations. In February 2004, the school was notified that it had been awarded a federal Reading First Grant had been awarded in the amount of \$606,552. This three-year

grant will provide significant support to the school's reading program for students in grades Kindergarten through three.

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

Finding 1: King Center Charter School has submitted academic plans for the next charter term that include the same Kindergarten through fourth grade configuration and use the same curriculum design as in the current charter. Evidence gathered at the renewal visit along with available achievement data indicate that the school has started to create a demonstrable school-wide culture of rigorous instruction.¹²

Finding 2: In its future plans, King Center proposes to double the size of the school during the next charter period; however, the school has not established an infrastructure that could support such growth.

Finding 3: The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter, although it faces challenges concerning its facility expansion needs.

King Center Charter School plans to continue with its current curriculum, which, as a result of its Reading First grant, provides a reading program that is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grades Kindergarten through three. Concurrently, it has put in place an assessment system where performance standards, instruction, student work and assessments are integrated. Unlike the math program where effectiveness has been demonstrated, the effectiveness of the reading program, while promising, has not yet been established. In addition, the alignment of the fourth grade curriculum and assessments, which are not part of the Reading First program, was not fully implemented at the time of the renewal visit. With these qualifications, the school's curriculum and assessment plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement.

King Center proposes to double the size of the school in the next charter. Such an expansion would expose the school to the risk of being overwhelmed by the demands of the larger organization. The school has not demonstrated that, as it is currently constituted, it has the infrastructure in place to realize a successful expansion. The school's instructional leadership consists to a great extent of a Reading First reading coach who has no experience as a supervisor. While the teachers are competent, they have benefited from having worked together for three years. There is no

¹² The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State's testing regimen or revisions to the Institute's Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

track record of hiring and training classroom teachers to become competent instructors in a short period of time. The Director, whose administrative talents have been critically important, would be spread thin by the demands of expanding the school facility. The Board has not demonstrated its ability to set the accountability requirements and performance expectations necessary for a growing organization. In general, given that King Center has not demonstrated its long-term effectiveness, plans for expansion are not reasonable.

The school's fiscal plan is based on many conservative assumptions and should provide a useable framework for the term of a new charter. However, the school's need for additional space presents challenges. The school's current space, which it leases from the King Urban Life Center, Incorporated (KULC), is too small to accommodate the proposed expansion from 105 to 210 students. The school's plans rely significantly on the ability of KULC (a not-for-profit organization) to obtain sufficient funding and to cost-effectively construct additional space. The proposed space is located across the street from its current facility. The estimated cost of leasing additional space is included in the school's fiscal plan starting at \$82,000 and rising by an additional \$42,000 per year in each of the next three years. In the last two years of the proposed new charter period, rent expense would be \$1,524 per student or approximately 18.5 percent of projected per-pupil revenue a somewhat high, but not injurious, level.

At the end of this charter period, the school is in a stable financial position. The Institute finds that the school's financial position during the term of a future charter should continue to be stable and will likely strengthen assuming the continued demand for enrollment in the school.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

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

Academic Attainment & Improvement

The King Center Charter School has had mixed success in meeting key academic outcomes. Over the life of the charter, the school has generally not met the critical English Language Arts (ELA) outcomes, the essential measures of basic literacy, it had set for itself. In 2003-04, the school met all its math goals and appears to have made substantial progress toward meeting its science goals.

In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, King Center has not met the criterion of success set in its ELA outcome measure and has had a low-level of performance during each of the three years the test has been administered. In

contrast to ELA, the school has shown steady progress, meeting the math goal in 2003-04. In science, King Center had a low-level of performance in 2001-02 and 2002-03 and made some progress toward meeting its goal in 2003-04.

In its comparative performance on the fourth grade state examinations, King Center measures itself against demographically similar schools. In ELA, the school performed below one comparison and the same as its second comparison in 2001-02, it outperformed all three of its comparison schools in 2002-03 and outperformed two of three in 2003-04. In math, the school underperformed all its comparisons in 2001-02 and 2002-03 again outperformed two of three in 2003-04. In science, the school underperformed all its comparisons in 2001-02 and 2002-03 outperformed one of three in 2003-04. King Center has performed below the Buffalo city district on all fourth grade state examinations each year with the exception of the 2003-04 state math exam.

Results have been mixed on the value-added to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the Woodcock-Johnson Test. In Reading, the average score of each cohort gained from spring-to-spring in the three years for which results can be calculated,¹³ but the gains were slight in 2001-02 and 2003-04. Only in 2002-03, when the gains were five percentile, did King Center meet its goal of a gain of three percentile per year. The gains each year are mostly attributable to the gains from Kindergarten to first grade. In the higher grades, scores declined or remained flat. In contrast to reading, the average scores in math for the two years of available data have increased substantially, exceeding the three-percentile goal each year.

The State Education Department has deemed King Center to be a *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years under the NCLB requirements. King Center did not include any unique outcome measures in its Accountability Plan.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, King Center Charter School set outcome measures to demonstrate its academic success in the key subjects of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as science. The outcome measures include the following three required types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the value-added to student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of student cohort performance on a school-selected standardized test. The following tables indicate the specific outcomes King Center set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹⁴

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

Besides the three required outcome measures, and the NCLB outcome measure, the school may also have included additional self-selected academic outcome measures as part of its Accountability Plan. These various outcome measures constitute the renewal benchmarks for academic attainment and improvement.

¹³ In its renewal application, King Center reports results for cohorts of students who have been in the school for three and four years. These results parallel the results discussed here.

¹⁴ Please note: since King Center has had a fourth grade for three years, it administered the state examinations for the first time in 2001-02. As 2000-01 was the school's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year.

Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	75% of students who have attended the King Center Charter School for 3 or more years will score at the third or fourth level on the New York State English Language Arts Assessment, administered to 4 th grade students every year.	4	No students in grade	11.1% ¹	22.2% ¹	20.0%
Math	75% of students who have attended the King Center Charter School for 3 or more years will score at the third or fourth level on the New York State Math Assessment, administered to 4 th grade students every year.	4	No students in grade	5.6% ¹	26.3% ¹	80.0%
Science	75% of students who have attended the King Center Charter School for 3 or more years will score at the third or fourth level on the New York State Science Assessment, administered to 4 th grade students every year. ²	4	No students in grade	22% ¹	16% ¹	60%

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

² Results on the science exam in 2001-02 and 2002-03 represent the proportion of students answering a pre-determined number of questions correctly (*i.e.*, the state designated level).

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Each year, the mean score of New York State English Language Arts Assessment for students who have attended the King Center Charter School for two or more years will exceed the average mean score of students enrolled in “similar schools’ within the Buffalo School District.	4	King Center	No students in grade	618 ¹	630	623
			BPS 12	N/A	627	617	
			BPS 37	624	616	618	
			BPS 53 Buffalo ²	618 633	619 634	634 633	
Math	Each year, the mean score of New York State Math Assessment for students who have attended the King Center Charter School for two or more years will exceed the average mean score of students enrolled in “similar schools’ within the Buffalo School District.	4	King Center	No students in grade	595 ¹	618	651
			BPS 12		639	644	
			BPS 37	N/A	614	624	624
			BPS 53 Buffalo ²	627 633	636 641	656 644	
Science	Each year, the mean score of New York State Science Assessment for students who have attended the King Center Charter School for two or more years will exceed the average mean score ³ of students enrolled in “similar schools’ within the Buffalo School District.	4	King Center	No students in grade	22 ¹	25 ¹	60%
			BPS 12		N/A	26	78%
			BPS 37	N/A	26	26	35%
			BPS 53 Buffalo ²	30 30	28 29	97% 67%	

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

² The results for the district are presented as an additional comparison; it is not included in the Accountability Plan.

³ Results on the science exam in 2001-02 and 2002-03 represent the average number of correct answers, where the State Education Department deems 30 correct answers to be passing (*i.e.*, achieving the state-designated level); the result for 2004 is the percent of students at Levels 3 and 4.

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

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading	Each cohort of King Center Charter School students will improve their reading skills by an average of 3 percentiles per year in national rank, according to the reading portion of the Woodcock Johnson Reading Test. Cohorts will include the scores of all eligible students in grades 1-4. (Results reported in NCEs)	1		5.9	14.6	8.0
		2	N/A	(-2.6)	1.1	(-7.1)
		3		(-1.3)	(-6.0)	(-1.4)
		4		0.2	(-2.8)	0.0
		ALL		0.9	2.9	0.2
Math	Each cohort of King Center Charter School students will improve their reading skills by an average of 3 percentiles per year in national rank, according to the reading portion of the Woodcock Johnson Math Test. Cohorts will include the scores of all eligible students in grades 1-4. (Results reported in NCEs)	1		N/A	15.5	15.4
		2	N/A		9.4	15.7
		3			4.1	5.4
		4			4.1	5.0
		ALL			8.9	10.4

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states King Center's 2003-04 School Accountability Status: *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years.

Student Achievement According to Unique Academic Measures

The school had no additional academic outcome measures in its Accountability Plan.

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the collection and analysis of student performance data, including data gathered from an analysis of student work pursuant to a set of well-defined and well-aligned standards; ● the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved; ● the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction; ● the regular communication between teachers and administrators of assessment results and a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of those results; and ● the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement. <p>More generally, a school should be able to demonstrate a system where performance standards, instruction, required student work and assessments are integrated and have led to increased student knowledge and skills.</p>
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With the resources afforded by the Reading First grant, King Center Charter School in its fifth year has developed a comprehensive assessment system which enables teachers to monitor student progress toward meeting the state standards and gauge the delivery of instruction. The effectiveness of this English Language Arts system has yet to be established. Through the first four years of the charter, the school’s internal assessments were geared to show individual progress, based mostly on idiosyncratic anecdotal evidence, derived from independent teacher judgment. While the assessments highlighted individual improvement and provided authentic evidence of a student’s accomplishment, they were either not aligned with state standards or not reliably scored. As such, until the fifth year, the only consistent measure the school has had for determining program effectiveness and student achievement has been the state’s fourth grade examinations.

During the first two years of the charter, King Center regularly employed only a Work Sampling Developmental Checklist and the Woodcock Johnson Broad Reading and Math standardized tests for internal assessment purposes. The Woodcock Johnson tests are effective in generating information about individual student needs. However, while they diagnose individual student skill deficiencies, they are not well aligned with the state standards and do not correlate well with the state’s fourth-grade examinations.

Because the assessments were not aligned to standards, King Center’s teachers and administrators were “shocked” at fourth grade students’ low performance at the end of the second year when they had taken the state examinations for the first time. According to the renewal application, “as a result of the poor performance..., the King Center

administration brought in consultants to study the possible reasons for poor performance, evaluate the curriculum and make recommendations for change.”¹⁵

As a result, in the third year, the school introduced a number of school-developed portfolios and a Student Progress Report, as part of an internal assessment system more closely aligned to state standards and intended to monitor the instructional program, as well as track student achievement. King Center began implementing a Literacy Portfolio which included the *Literacy Profile* (Kindergarten through three), developed by the State Education Department. In addition to the *Literacy Profile*, the portfolio also contained a writing rubric (the *Six Traits of Writing*) and a listening and speaking scale to evaluate students. The school introduced a Math Portfolio, containing a checklist of specific grade level benchmarks that reflected the school’s Scott Foresman curriculum and aligned with the state standards. In addition, the school introduced the Student Progress report, which, as a report card, evaluates student performance on work completed during each grading period, including classroom tests, written assignments, and homework. Besides informing parents about their children’s progress, the Student Progress Report has been used for tracking academic progress. While there was a proliferation of assessment tools, student work was not systematically collected or evaluated.

In its third year inspection report, SchoolWorks indicates “there appeared to be a range of expectations for the quality of student responses and student work demonstrations. Similar variation was evident in student work products in notebooks and folders kept in classrooms. Some notebooks contained numerous daily exercises, while others held few. Some work included teacher comments, but many did not. The revised assessment system in development this year appears *not* to be fully in place in every classroom. Overall, classrooms at King Center Charter School varied by teacher in the level of expectations to which students are held.”

At the time of the renewal visit, two years after their introduction, neither the literacy and math portfolio, nor the Student Progress Reports have developed into reliable sources of information on student performance. The school’s Director and teachers reported that the school has not had a standardized process for collecting student work to include in portfolios. Rather, the math portfolios have been used as folders for collecting work samples as points of reference at parent-teacher conferences. Similarly, the literacy portfolio has been used by teachers as a record-keeping summary tool. The Director acknowledged that ELA assessments through the fourth year of the charter have been too loose and that the literacy portfolio has not provided the information needed to monitor fluency and determine specific interventions. She further indicated that these in-house assessments have not been aligned well with the fourth grade state examinations and that the Student Progress Report has been a poor predictor of performance the fourth grade ELA examination. King Center has regularly communicated with parents, but the renewal application acknowledges that Student Progress Report scores were inflated and are still not consistently used by all the teachers.

In the fifth year of its charter, King Center has begun instituting a number of internal assessments under its Reading First program for grades Kindergarten through three. Under the program’s Assessment Framework, the school now administers the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills DIBELS, which are both aligned to state standards. In addition to these diagnostic tools, the school is using the assessment instruments from its curriculum programs: *Harcourt Trophies 2005* and *Waterford Early Reading Program*. DIBELS and PPVT are used for

¹⁵ The renewal application reports that King Center administration and teachers studied the standardized test scores together in an attempt to make sense of indications of progress or lack of progress and had found that the general trend in the *Woodcock Johnson* Scores was a decrease in NCE scores beginning as early as second grade but always by third grade.

identifying students for special interventions; the two of them along with the Harcourt and Waterford assessments are used for monitoring the progress of students in the reading program. In addition to these internal assessments, Reading First required that the school administer the TerraNova norm-referenced test, which is closely aligned with the state standards and replaced the Woodcock Johnson test.

The Reading First Program funds a Reading Coordinator and a Reading Coach. The coordinator collects teachers' hand-scored sheets, analyzes them with the teachers, creates reports of test scores, and decides, based on benchmarks on subtests, whether intervention is necessary. The coach supports the teachers' implementation of the *Harcourt* core reading curriculum, as well as the intervention and supplemental programs, including interpreting assessment results. The coordinator and coach help teachers with weekly Waterford evaluations.

Teachers discuss student progress on assessments with the coordinator and make recommendations on student grouping by ability; second- and third-grade teachers communicate frequently and plan together especially since they instruct cross-grade lessons. The reading coordinator sends books home with students through the Waterford program. At the time of the renewal visit, teachers were familiar with the weekly achievement reports provided by the reading coordinator, and appeared to have a clear understanding of their meaning.

For writing assessment, the teaching staff developed grade-specific rubrics from the fourth grade exam's writing rubric and a general rubric provided by the University of Buffalo. They formulated the rubrics in consultation with *Six Traits in Writing* which delineates grade level expectations. Using the rubric, teachers are expected to evaluate a finished piece of student work every two weeks. During the renewal visit, the team found that rubrics were attached to displayed student writing samples, using a four-level scale, based on the six traits. Third grade papers on display reflected a mixed level of student understanding regarding the mechanics of writing. Poor grammar was not uncommon, and the teacher did not correct the writing samples themselves.

With the Reading First program, the school has begun to implement an ELA assessment system for grades Kindergarten through three. The school is putting in place a comprehensive set of assessments for monitoring student progress, identifying students in need of special intervention, and examining program outcomes – each among the various components of the reading curriculum. To the extent that the Reading First program is a *Kindergarten through three reading program*, the school has not implemented an assessment program that is as systematic in writing and in the fourth grade.

Despite the limitations of the math portfolio, the school has shown meaningful and consistent improvement in math achievement, according to the state's fourth grade math exam. This success suggests that the portfolio's discrete benchmarks, which are aligned to the key ideas in the state's math standards, may be helpful as a scope and sequence guide in delivering the math curriculum. By the Director's and teachers' own accounting, it has never evolved into a viable portfolio.

In summary, King Center appears to have had an abiding interest in using data to improve its program, but until the fifth year, its assessment instruments have been either unreliable or not aligned with state standards, essentially precluding the possibility of using the assessment results for determining if students were achieving state standards. While the school has made changes over the life of the charter in its instructional program, the changes were generally precipitated by results on the state's fourth grade examinations, and to some extent by the individually administered Woodcock Johnson Standardized achievement tests, but not by any other internal assessment data.

Benchmark 1C
Curriculum

1C

The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance standards.

The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.

With the resources of the Reading First grant, the school has developed a clearly defined quality curriculum in ELA. Teachers deliver the curriculum consistently based on the school's pacing and scope and sequence guides. As the school recognizes in its renewal application, the curriculum has developed over the life of the charter from a loose amalgamation of topics related to the state standards to an organized, cohesive entity. The math curriculum has been more effective starting in the third year of the charter.

In its inspection report during the third year of King Center's charter, SchoolWorks found that from its origin, the school's curriculum was based on the New York State standards, but, as initially conceived, was too general. In response to poor performance on state assessments and to support its generally young and inexperienced teachers, beginning in summer 2002 several consultants guided the staff in refining the curriculum into more concise tools listing overarching state standards and explicit descriptions of student performance tasks appropriate to each achievement level. In reading/English Language Arts, the school adopted a *Four Blocks* model for literacy instruction to clarify and refine the general state frameworks. The blocks consist of guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. Classification of skills and knowledge typical of each level of proficiency were captured in the Literacy Portfolio, a physical folder in which teachers collect and record student progress over time. While SchoolWorks found that the skills and content for each proficiency category were "appropriate to the achievement levels and reflected expectations consistent with state standards," they were less well-defined than those for mathematics.

Because the state's math curriculum framework consists of more discrete key ideas, a proficient level of skill and knowledge can be more readily defined with precision. In working with a consultant, King Center was able to align the Scott Foresman core curriculum in mathematics to the state frameworks at each grade level with greater specificity than is possible in English Language Arts. The outcome of their efforts, the benchmarks in the Math Portfolio, appear to have been a useful tool, given the steady yearly increase in the fourth grade state examination in mathematics.

While the school administration concluded after the third year that the math and science curriculum had put them on track to improve student learning and achievement, the reading curriculum continued to be problematic. At the beginning of the fourth year, the school determined that a strong core reading program that included support materials would enable the teachers to implement successfully the school's *Four Blocks* model. Fortuitously, in the middle of the fourth year, the school received its Kindergarten through third grade Reading First grant, which has enabled the school to bolster its resources for a revamped reading program.

The Director reported that the school selected *Harcourt Trophies 2005* for its core reading program in particular because of its interesting books, and its chapter and unit assessments. To supplement Harcourt, the school is also using the *Waterford Early*

Reading Program for all Kindergarten through second grade students and as a remediation tool for third grade students. King Center's students have continued to need additional support in phonemic awareness and phonics, which the Waterford program provides.

The school has developed grade-specific Kindergarten through third grade ELA curriculum guides based on the state's standards and the Harcourt's teacher manuals. The guides are broken down by the six traits of reading and writing, as well as the state standards in listening and speaking. In addition to the curriculum guides, teachers have a scope and sequence chart from Harcourt. For the fourth grade, the school developed a curriculum guide, based on the state standards. Each teacher has a guide in her classroom; teacher plan books contain references to the ELA guides.

Aside from the recently introduced ELA curriculum, King Center continues to use the math portfolio benchmarks with the Scott Foresman math series, as well as the "Measuring Up" text to develop a pacing schedule. With regard to social studies and science, the renewal application indicates that the school uses Scott Foresman science books in the third and fourth grades and "the whole school uses the *National Geographic Explorer*". However, no sequence or pacing schedules for either subject were available. In fact, the renewal team found no evidence of a social studies curriculum except for classroom activities focusing on a holiday or discussions of current events.

Based on observations during the renewal visit, teachers at each grade level were well aware of the school's curriculum components. Classroom walls were covered with displays of guidelines and standards related to the curricular areas of English Language Arts, mathematics, and science. The school's focus on English Language Arts was evident through the amount of daily instructional time dedicated to ELA and the plethora of Harcourt materials throughout the school.

In its fifth year, King Center is implementing a well-defined ELA curriculum and continues to implement an effective math curriculum. Its ELA and math scope and sequence define with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve. Given the alignment with state standards and adherence to the Harcourt and Scott Foresman series, the curriculum is cohesive and seamless from grade to grade.

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

At the time of the renewal visit, classroom practice reflected competent teaching and instructional strategies that engaged students. Teachers generally provided instruction effectively and efficiently. With Reading First personnel and resources supporting small group instruction, the school is able to help students who are struggling academically to achieve. The school has developed a strong administrative capacity, but does not provide sufficient ongoing instructional leadership.

Quality of Instruction

The teachers, who have been at King Center for most of the charter period, have become with increasing experience much more adept at delivering purposeful, focused lessons with a clear sense of expectations for the quality of student work. Teachers consistently provided instruction that adhered to the school’s curriculum sequence and pacing documents. Teachers in grades Kindergarten through three demonstrated a more effective grasp of the instructional strategies of the school’s curricular programs than the fourth

grade teacher, who did not appear to be as facile with various curriculum components, perhaps because the fourth grade is not included in the Reading First program.

As in ELA, mathematics instruction was provided in a synchronous manner. It was evident that teachers followed a pacing guide and planned their instruction. Students received additional assistance as needed within the classroom structure from the various available assistant and student teachers. There was no evidence of any student being left behind and work was at appropriate levels for students to learn.

Classroom management was generally effective. Teacher assistants enabled students to remain focused and to transition smoothly from large group to small group activities. Students were on task the vast majority of instructional time. Procedures (*e.g.*, small group membership, rotations, and the daily schedule) were displayed. Teachers appeared to have well planned activities with universally understood routines, and efficient transitions between lessons and activities. Lessons were interesting, academically rigorous and age appropriate. Teachers generally had a strong knowledge of the curriculum

Typically, classes were organized for small group instruction. Typically, for reading, each group of approximately six students worked according to a routinized rotation system with the classroom teacher and a teacher's assistant. The teacher instructed one group, the assistant worked one-on-one with students in a second group, and a third group of students worked independently in their ELA journals. For example, during the second grade reading time block, the renewal team observed that groups were dispersed to focus on a variety of tasks, including working in their ELA journals, engaging in Waterford activities on-line, doing computerized math practice work, and working on a spelling/vocabulary assignment, as the teacher read with individual students. During the third grade reading time block, in one classroom center, the teacher conducted a lesson in reading comprehension; in the second center, the teacher's assistant conducted a grammar lesson, using compound sentences; and in the third center, students completed an independent reading assignment, answering questions in their journals.

Instruction for At-Risk Students

Aside from the general delivery of instruction, King Center has improved its identification of academically at-risk students and refined its remedial services. Prior to the fourth year of its charter, King Center provided special resources for a number of special programs offered as extended school year and summer programs, but none of these programs were demonstrably effective.

In spring 2004, the school introduced an after-school tutoring program for second to fourth grade students with below grade-level performance, but the 50 students served were not effectively evaluated given that their needs were determined based to a great extent on Woodcock Johnson reading scores from the previous year. More recently, in summer 2004, King Center offered a Reading Camp; it was attended by 76 of 84 students. Three teachers from the King Center teaching staff provided the program, using the Harcourt reading curriculum.

At the time of the renewal visit, King Center was implementing its reading program with a great deal of attention to serving academically at-risk students. The school is using *Harcourt Interventions*, which provides supplemental materials to the regular Harcourt program. The Reading First grant includes a variety of assessments to monitor student progress and provide remedial support, as needed. The reading coach's responsibilities include working with students who are not making adequate progress; and the school's small group instructional approach is conducive to serving at-risk students.

The reading coordinator is in charge of ensuring that students struggling with reading in Kindergarten through third grades get additional services, based on results from the Reading First PPVT and DIBELS tests. She regularly administers the tests to monitor student progress and discusses the results with the classroom teachers. The reading coach is responsible for coordinating the intervention services. Students are assigned to intervention groups according to their performance on the DIBELS assessment.

The school uses small group instruction in all subject areas, with each classroom being assigned a teacher assistant, who at times provides students with extra help in areas of weakness (identified by the teacher). The assistants enable the teachers to work with small groups and to differentiate instruction, as well as to use instructional tools such as *Measuring Up* to track student progress. In addition, the school is now using results from the TerraNova test, administered in June, for placing students in reading groups based on their performance level and skill mastery. Because of its alignment with the state ELA examination, the TerraNova is a more useful screening instrument than the Woodcock Johnson had been.

King Center has a comprehensive special education identification and screening process in place. The school has seven identified students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs), three previously identified and four newly identified this school year. Each teacher has a copy of the IEP and it is kept in a locked file cabinet. The school offers consultant teacher and resource room services to students, and uses a “pull-out” model to provide resource room services. The services are provided in a space in the front stairwell of the building.

The special education coordinator also works with classroom teachers to modify lessons and assessments. She meets with teachers to review IEPs and explain the goal sheets that go home each marking period. The special education coordinator meets 45 minutes each week with the reading coach to discuss intervention strategies, Harcourt, DIBELS scores and other questions about curriculum and assessment. As the special education coordinator, she is also familiar with the second, third, and fourth grade curricula. She meets with the Director on an as-needed basis and is part of weekly faculty meetings. Her schedule includes time to monitor students in each classroom and also to check the behavioral skills of students in the fourth grade. She gauges her effectiveness through feedback from classroom teachers, student test scores, and talking with parents.

Leadership

The King Center Charter School has had one school leader, the Director, since its inception. After the first year, she enlisted the school’s first grade teacher, to work as her Assistant Director, in order to assist in monitoring and supporting teachers and their learning environments. In overseeing instructional and management operations of the school through the life of its charter, the Director has been a strong administrator. As noted in the renewal application, she has worked with teachers, consultants, a Research Advisory Committee and the Board of Trustees in ongoing formative program evaluation. She has organized professional development opportunities based on both curricular and individual needs. In addition, she developed a system of ongoing support for research and professional development from local colleges and universities and has sent teachers to national training workshops. She has nurtured a strong relationship with the local community and sustained strong school ties to the King Urban Life Center. She has also been successful in winning special grants for the school program. These accomplishments all attest to her ability as an administrator.

On the other hand, the Director has not demonstrated equal strength or skill as an *instructional* leader. In lieu of providing direct, sustained, classroom-based support for daily teaching and learning, she has relied on others to provide professional development

to teachers. While such a structure is eminently feasible in a large school with a number of supervisors and a cadre of staff developers, King Center, as a small school with limited resources, relies more directly on its school leader to provide pedagogical support.

During the renewal visit, the team asked teachers who the school's instructional leader was. After appearing somewhat perplexed and seeking clarification to the question, they would then rationalize that it was the Director. The only exception to this response was the Assistant Director who did not hesitate to say that she was actually the school's instructional leader, along with the Reading First coach and resource staff. The Assistant Director said that teachers come to her "all the time" for guidance and direction regarding instruction. Her peer support may be invaluable, but it is limited by virtue of her classroom responsibilities as the first grade teacher.

Over the first four years of the school's charter, the Director has developed the staff and the school program in her capacity as the school administrator. In response to low student performance on state examinations, after the second and third years, she formed study groups, hired consultants, conferred with parents and teachers to address the school's instructional challenges as a curriculum problem. The remedy was to generate revised curricula through consultant/teacher work groups, which she oversaw as the administrator. In developing the staff, the Director has been a supportive, nurturing administrator, monitoring the quality of the working conditions and enlisting outside consultants and university experts to mentor the teachers. A benefit to this approach has been a loyal teaching staff dedicated to the school mission with minimal teacher turnover during the charter period, a critically important factor in developing a cohesive instructional program.

Nonetheless, the Director has not been sufficiently focused on the quality of instruction. While she has utilized university mentors over the life of the charter and the Reading First reading coach in the fifth year of the charter for professional development, she has provided limited pedagogical supervision and guidance to the teachers.

As the school administrator, the Director has put a great deal of time and effort into evaluating the school program and reviewing the school's achievement data from a broad, macro perspective. On the other hand, as the school's instructional leader, she has not used the assessment data at the classroom level to work with teachers to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. The renewal team did not find evidence of the Director using assessment data to gauge individual teacher effectiveness.

The Director was not well-versed on the school's assessment program, was unclear about the meaning of performance levels when portfolio data were collected, about the extent to which the portfolios were actually used as *portfolios*, and about how work samples and unit test scores contributed to Student Progress Report scores and grade level expectations. In not being totally acquainted with assessment procedures and the scoring conventions of the non-standardized tests, the Director has been missing opportunities to help teachers to focus on their students' progress, to reflect on their own teaching, and to monitor the quality of student work. Indeed, the renewal team found little evidence that the Director reviewed student work, especially writing, with teachers or discussed assessments to determine learning.

While the school has benefited from the Director's administrative style, the approach has also meant lost opportunity for professional development and delays in improving the instructional program. In its fifth year, with the Reading First grant, the reading coach and reading coordinator are providing staff development and assessment support to the Kindergarten through three teachers. At the time of the visit, it was unclear how much support the fourth grade receives, as the fourth grade is not covered by the grant. More importantly, it is unclear if, and how, King Center will institutionalize these instructional leadership supports when the grant ends in two years.

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Teaching Staff</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school’s instructional staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will be able to demonstrate that teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success. (While handled under the benchmark for legal and charter compliance, it is important to note that a school must also be able to demonstrate that teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under both federal and state law with few exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with this requirement of law, the school should be able to show that it has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures.)</p>
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King Center Charter School teachers are all certified in grades one through six or nursery, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten education. In addition, three of the five classroom teachers hold masters’ degrees in early childhood education, elementary education and reading. The renewal application notes that the technology coordinator and literacy coordinator are highly qualified, even though certification is not required in those areas. The renewal team found that all teachers were competent in the content areas of English Language Arts and mathematics. Their competency in social studies and science was not readily observable during the renewal visit.

Three of the five teachers began their third year with the school and two began their fifth year. Only one of the five teachers has been at the school for less than three years. However, four of the five also began their teaching careers at King Center. While the King Center has a young staff, there is also an anchor teacher with 17 years experience.

The King Center has hired certified teachers in the assistant teaching positions for three of the five positions over the last two years. Three of the five classroom instructional assistants during the 2003-04 school year were certified teachers and all three of them were “highly qualified.” Three of the five have been at King Center two or more years, and four of the five began their classroom work experience at the school.

<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has documented discipline policies and procedures (for regular and special education students) and has consistently enforced those policies. As implemented and enforced, the discipline policy will have promoted calm, safe classrooms where students are required to (and not distracted from) participating fully in all learning activities. Students at a school meeting this benchmark will also generally report a reasonable sense of security. A school will also be able to provide appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.</p>
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King Center Charter School has made significant improvements in its discipline program and classroom management practices. These efforts have resulted in an environment in which students generally come prepared to learn. Students were orderly with minimal needs for additional guidance. Lunchroom environment, and general hallway environment was calm and safe. Students seemed very aware of the expectations and followed the directions that they were given. In cases where a student was off-task during a lesson, the teacher would direct the student to take a time out, with little fuss made over the sanction and no instructional time lost in the process. For more significant behavioral issues, the school has a discipline policy,¹⁶ which was provided by the school.

According to the Charter Schools Institute’s End of Year Report, completed after the second year of King Center’s charter, observations of classes in all grade levels at King Center revealed a lack of consistent behavioral expectations. In several classrooms, disruptive students repeatedly detracted from the learning environment and from other students’ ability to learn. In at least some cases behavioral issues appeared to be made worse by reluctance on the part of teachers to state behavioral expectations clearly and directly to children. As a result of the problems with order and discipline, King Center initiated a major professional development effort to improve classroom management. Called the Responsive Classroom, it aims to instill in teachers a clear and consistent set of expectations for students in all areas of the school.

A year later, in its third year inspection report, SchoolWorks indicated that “the consistent application of the King Center Charter School’s discipline system has fostered the development of a respectful, orderly school climate, through generalized use of consistent strategies as well as the focused use of intensive interventions.”

At the time of the renewal visit, the team found that the school promoted calm, safe classrooms where students participate fully in all learning activities. The following examples taken from each of the five classes are illustrative of the school’s order and discipline.

- In the Kindergarten class, it was evident from their behavior that students had already acclimated to being in school. They anticipated each activity, and clearly

¹⁶ For the discipline of students with disabilities, the school has a policy that includes the possibility of suspension. However, prior to reaching that level, students with disabilities would receive a “behavioral intervention plan”, counseling and a review meeting within five days. During that time, however, IEP services would continue to be provided.

took cues from each other. They were excited and anxious to both participate and please.

- In the first grade, the teacher had strong management skills and set expectations for voice levels and general behavior. She required that students make “good decisions” when sitting (no lag time between activities) and use verbal positive reinforcement for students following procedures. Overall, students were very well behaved and focused. One child who was consistently misbehaving after a warning was sent to the teacher’s assistant to minimize disruption.
- In the second grade class, children appeared to be oblivious to the low-level din prevalent throughout the school, as a result of its partitions in open space. The teachers in this class operated in a no-nonsense, no excuses mode. The attitude displayed was that there was no time for dawdling, “...let's go.” Students clearly knew routines and expectations regarding entering the classroom, working together during the lesson, selecting and reading a book alone at the large table, in the big chair, or on the carpeted area of the room.
- In the third grade, students seemed accustomed to the routines and were clear about the expectations when smoothly transitioning from one activity to another. However, all students did not sustain their focus on each activity, perhaps because small snacks were distributed while students were working.
- In the fourth grade, the teacher clearly outlined the expectations for spelling; some students would work with her and others would work independently at their desks. If they finished the assigned work, they could go over their writing assignment from the previous day. She also reminded them that they were to work silently at their seats.

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

Prior to implementing the Reading First grant, King Center Charter School’s professional development program consisted of engaging outside consultants and experts to provide training to teachers. The renewal application notes that the Director “has led teachers into new program commitments by ensuring that professional development opportunities are available to support program commitments...” Teachers would attend on-site and off-site seminars and meetings with most sessions addressing teaching and learning conducted by outside sources. The application indicates that professional development opportunities have been provided for the King Center Charter School teachers on a regular basis over the past four years. Prior to beginning school, there were multiple sessions that focused on the state standards and the school’s developmental checklists, along with the resource materials for reading, math and science. In the summers of 2002 and 2003, the professional development focused on improving student and academic performance with in-service training from educational consultants providing instruction in the *Early Literacy Profile*, *the Six Traits of Writing*, *the Four Blocks Reading Program*, *Early Childhood Math*, *Math for Grades Three and Four* and *Hands on Science: Kindergarten through four*.

Teachers stated that the training activities have helped them improve their lesson plan development, delivery of lessons, and classroom management. However, the professional program has resulted in mixed student achievement results, as demonstrated by standardized exams.

In contrast to the disconnected professional development activities of the first four years of the charter, King Center is currently providing a more cohesive and comprehensive program. As a result of Reading First training during the summer, Kindergarten through fourth grade teachers received a solid introduction into the Harcourt and Waterford curriculum materials, as well as the DIBELS assessment. The Kindergarten through fourth grade teachers are participating in Reading First's Reading Academy, an online program. Because the Instructional Leadership Team, which includes the Assistant Director, the Reading First Coordinator and the Reading Coach, is in-house, teachers receive professional development in the program's curriculum and assessments with on-going guidance, follow-up and review, especially from the coach.

Weekly faculty meetings include topics on instruction. In addition, teachers reported that they have time to serve as resources to each other, thereby ensuring consistent quality of instruction, adherence to the pacing guidelines, and uniformity in assessment administration and scoring. Because the current professional development program is being implemented for the first full year, evidence of direct impact on student achievement is not yet available. The King Center has included the fourth grade teachers in the professional program as much as possible, given that the Reading First Program only serves the Kindergarten through third grades. While the Director and the Reading Coach reported working with the fourth grade on reading instruction, the arrangements were more ad hoc and limited.

Teacher Evaluation

King Center's Director has employed various formal evaluation protocols. The renewal application implies that during the first two years of the charter she provided teachers with a loosely structured written statement about their annual performance. In the last two years, the Director has used a more formal template, based on a rubric to assess mostly the learning environment rather than instruction itself.

In reviewing examples of last year's evaluations, the renewal team found that they lacked specific suggestions of how teachers could improve lessons. Instead, the focus seems to have been on what the Director perceived worked well. In places where the Director identified an area for improvement, there were no strategies or approaches suggested to teachers. No in-depth analysis for teacher improvement of instructional strategies, planning, implementation and classroom management was provided in the written evaluations. Presumably, the Director recognized some of these limitations to the evaluative process herself, since she told the renewal team that the protocol was too holistic and early childhood-oriented, while not supporting a focus on rigorous instruction.

As a result, at the time of the renewal visit, she had just introduced yet another protocol; teachers were becoming acquainted with it. This new protocol requires a 15-minute observation to provide teachers with quick feedback on: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. However, the renewal team found that its format also only permits limited feedback and suggestions for improvement. In using this system for teacher evaluation, the Director would not see a lesson through from beginning to end, and therefore, would not be able to comment on a teacher's timing, lesson progression, student assessment during the lesson, *etc...*

At the time of the renewal visit, the Director reported that she spends a lot of time in classrooms, but provides no deliberate feedback; rather, she carries on informal, supportive conversations with the teachers about their classrooms and their work.

Renewal Question 2

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A
School Specific Non-Academic Goals

2A **The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.**

Goal: Every child will behave in a socially acceptable manner.

According to the school’s renewal application, approximately 20 percent of King Center students were identified annually who demonstrated inappropriate social behavior or problem behaviors based on teacher observation and parent consultation. The school projected that 40 percent of those students would improve behavior by the end of the year. The school succeeded in this goal over the last two years. The school used the Social Skills Rating System to measure the students’ progress, administered once in the fall and again in the spring.

Goal: Parents will become active partners in their child’s education program.

According to the school’s renewal application, the school measured homework support, attendance at parent/teacher conferences and volunteer hours spent supporting school activities. Over the last three years, at least 80 percent of parents supported their children’s homework 90 percent of the time.

The school provided a parent liaison (Home Connection Coordinator) through the Home Connection Program over the last four years. The Coordinator assists families in a variety of ways to support their child in his/her educational needs, and is available to meet with parents to discuss any issue that may prevent their child from being successful in school.

The parent-teacher conference includes an electronic portfolio where parents see and hear a digitized video clip of their child reading. According to the school’s renewal application, this serves as a motivator for parent participation, and gives teachers a context for suggesting easy-to-understand ways the parent may help the child improve. Parents also receive a copy of a written report on the child’s progress. Parent participation in parent-teacher conferences jumped from 53.3 percent in 2000-01 to over 92 percent the following three years.

According to the school’s renewal application, 35 percent of families provided 30 hours or more in volunteer service to the school in year two. In 2002-03 there was a total 868 hours of volunteer work for the school. The application further states that about 20 percent of parents provided more than 20 hours a year, and 100 percent of parents participated in a volunteer role for at least one hour per year. Volunteers read with students, assist at learning centers, monitor computer use, make phone calls, assist on field trips, work at Carnival in the Park, serve on the Directors Advisory Council, organize books and cut out decorations. The school reports that recording accurate data to support these participation numbers has been difficult and accurate record keeping will be prioritized in the future.

To further involve parents in their children's education, the school established a Parent Child Home Program, which began in September 2001-02. The program offered a 39-week, two thirty-minute home visits each week, home-based instructional program with a focus on literacy skills. This program is for three- and four-year-olds that will be entering Kindergarten at the school, including some younger siblings of current students. A total of thirty preschool children and families were enrolled in the program.

<p>Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B</p> <p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has school Board members, parents, teachers, school leader(s) and community partners that consistently present evidence of the school’s success with reference to the school’s mission and the key design elements included in its charter application. Key elements of the school’s design are well implemented and the school’s academic results, governance, and instructional practices reflect the mission of the school.</p>
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The school’s mission, as set forth in its Accountability Plan, is as follows:

The King Center Charter School provides a viable alternative to traditional education in a bright, colorful, open space where children utilize a year-round calendar to engage in individualized technology rich learning experiences. Key elements to the success of the program include institutional accountability for outcomes, educational research supported through a distance technology link to area colleges and universities, and a commitment to meaningful parent involvement.¹⁷

In general, all stakeholders are knowledgeable about the school’s mission and the methods the school uses to fulfill it. In particular, Board members and the academic leadership team were clearly aware of the mission and cited, in particular, the “unique” nature of the school, not only as a place where children learn but as a research instrument for colleges and universities, including those affiliated with the school, e.g., Buffalo State. In addition, Board members, parents, teachers and the school leader believe the unique nature of the school, its “caring environment” and the use of technology have led to increased student learning and achievement and reference these qualities when discussing the school; however, as noted in Benchmark 1A above, the school has, in fact, limited data to support evidence of improvements in student learning and achievement.

The key design elements of the school are:

- Longer school year,
- Improving students’ social and emotional development,
- Institutional accountability for outcomes,
- Educational research supported through a distance technology link to area colleges and universities,
- Utilize performance-based accountability systems by incorporating multimedia portfolios, and
- Provide opportunities for parents to become active partners in the educational program.

¹⁷ In its application, the school presents the mission statement set forth in the charter application. However, that mission statement was superseded by the statement quoted above and is therefore not operative.

As with the charter, the school's stakeholders are aware of and can articulate the key design elements of the school; and with the exception of two elements, *i.e.*, "utilize performance-based accountability systems by incorporating multimedia portfolios" and "institutional accountability for outcomes," the school has generally implemented them. King Urban Life Center (the affiliated social service center) has provided social services to the children and families in order to enhance their social and emotional development, especially in the years prior to Kindergarten. In addition, and based on school-conducted surveys as well as the Institute's interview with a focus group of parents, parents do feel welcome in the school and view their role as partners in their children's education. In this regard, the school notes the success it has had in having nearly all parents attend parent-teacher conferences. In terms of a longer school year, the school retains a 185-day schedule. However, the school's vision of a year-around school has not been realized.

The school has also fully implemented an extensive program of "educational research supported through a distance technology link to area colleges and universities." Buffalo State as well as other area teacher colleges have established a video link to the classrooms at the school and use those videos to assist them in training their teacher candidates. Members of the Board considered this program a particular success of the school, a view discussed at Benchmarks 2C.1 and 2C.2

The school has not utilized performance-based accountability systems by incorporating multimedia portfolios. While there are folders of student work, they are not linked to a performance-based accountability system. They do not determine a student's or class' instruction and they are not used to evaluate teachers or the educational program as a whole. Rather they are used to show parents during parent-teacher conferences work that the student has created.

The school has also not shown that there is institutional accountability for outcomes. To the contrary, and as set forth in more detail at Benchmarks 2C.1 and 2C.2, the Board of Trustees has taken few if any steps to impose accountability on the administrative team and in turn, the administrative team has not had in place the tools, processes or culture to consistently hold teachers accountable based on their performance.

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

Conflict of Interests/By-laws

The school has always had in effect a reasonable and complete conflict-of-interest policy and appears to have abided by it. Parent members of the Board seem to understand the role that they play and are sensitive to issues of confidentiality and appearances of favoritism as to their own children. Based on the evidenced reviewed, including Board minutes, the Board appears to have abided by its by-laws.

Avenues for Parents to Voice Their Concerns

The school has two parent members of the Board as set forth in the school’s application. Besides this avenue, parents report that the school leadership and Board are responsive to their concerns and provide them with ample avenue to voice them. Written policies also are complete in this regard.

Oversight

During the life of the charter, the Board has mainly relied on reports from the school's Director as its chief means of providing oversight of the effectiveness of the school program; it has not had and does not have a defined set of interim benchmarks/measures/goals by which to track progress and determine that effectiveness, other than the Accountability Plan and the evaluation of the state and nationally normed assessments required under that plan. Nor does it have a defined set of means to do so and the Board's program/educational committee has not been fully functional.

Despite critically low performance with, at best, incremental annual increases on the state ELA test, the Board took limited action, mostly focused on curriculum modification, and did not hold the administrative team accountable for results. The Board's response is particularly notable after the 2002-03 school year when it failed to act with appropriate urgency about continued low ELA performance. While Board members expressed shock at the school's scores on the fourth grade interim assessments (which were received by the school in the summer and early autumn of 2003 and which were very low), the only substantive action that the Board took was to approve the school administrators' wish to apply for a Reading First grant, an application that could not be filed until January 2004 and which would not commence in earnest until the 2004-05 school year. As a result, a year in which the school should have had urgent remedial programs in place was lost, despite the fact that student ELA performance after the 2002-03 school year had remained at a critically low level. During that same time, the Board had no formal process for evaluating the school administrative team, including the Director—and despite the low test scores did not formally set out academic or other goals for the school's Director and administrative team to meet (Board interview; 2002-03 report). This has changed to some degree between the fourth and fifth year. There is now in place an evaluation instrument. However, Board members agreed that it was “a work in progress” and that it was still being refined. When asked to explain the low outcome measures at the school as a whole, the only answer that Board members offered up was that the children who came to the school were difficult to educate. Besides that, Board members could not account for the school's performance and retained full confidence in their school leader.

Despite low baseline scores in 2001-02 and continued signs of low performance in the two years subsequent, the Board and the school leadership team also continued to approve the expenditure of money, and more importantly, time and energy on its partnerships with local colleges of education. Indeed, this purpose was cited frequently during the Board interview as integral to the school's success. For instance, one Board member asserted that the school is different and sure to be successful simply because it is “research based.” However, the school was unable to cite any evidence that the distance-learning program benefited the school and its students or increased student learning and achievement.

Board Policies and Procedures

Based on the renewal visit interview, it does not appear that the Board has available to it a fully developed set of policies and procedures nor a defined timetable or system for review of them.

<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by survey results as well as the volume of parents who choose the school to provide education for their children and the degree to which parents persist with that choice over the child’s academic career.</p> <p>The school that satisfies this benchmark will be able to show through generally accepted surveying standards and practices that a large majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school are satisfied with the school. As only a well-informed parent can be meaningfully satisfied, the school must be able to show that it has provided to parents detailed and accurate information about their child’s performance as well as the performance of the school as a whole. The school should also be able to provide data on application lottery, enrollment and persistence rates to demonstrate that large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school, and far more importantly, keep their children enrolled year-to-year. Ideal survey data will also provide an explanation for the persistence rate experienced by the school.</p>
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Parents strongly support the King Center Charter School’s education of their children, as evidenced by the extent of their school volunteer work and attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Parents also adamantly voiced their admiration and appreciation for the academic, social, and emotional growth of their children. Parents repeatedly emphasized that the school served much more than an academic function, and that they knew the administrators and staff on a very personal level, as if they were family.

A group of six parents, whose children had attended the school since Kindergarten, were interviewed on the first day of the renewal visit. They indicated that the school had struggled in the beginning, but that it has grown over the years. As a group, the parents were pleased with the social and emotional growth of their children and stressed the significant role that the community center plays for not only the children, but also for other members of a student’s family. They claimed that many of the parents chose to enroll their children in King Center Charter School, even though other options were available to them. Each of the parents in the group loudly echoed the strength of parent participation in signing student homework. Stories were rampant about teachers calling parents, if homework was not turned in on the following school day. Parents have a great deal of communication with the school and their child’s teachers. At the parent teacher conferences, they said they met one-on-one with the teachers. Parents also reported viewing a video of their child during the conference in which they could track their child’s progress in reading and math.

According to the school’s renewal application, all parents are encouraged to complete a Parent Survey during the last two weeks of the school year. The spring 2004 surveys had a response rate of 90 percent. The school reports that this was the first year that it received no response in the negative category: all responding excellent, good, or satisfactory. Only 1.3 percent responded, “don’t know.” Further, 93 percent of parents participated in the three parent-teacher conferences in 2003-04.

The school has maintained consistent enrollment and on average more than 85 percent of the students return each year. The waiting list at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year was 43; for 2004-05, it is 55. The renewal application does not indicate enrollment and waiting list data over the life of the charter.

<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p> <p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>
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The Institute’s compliance review reviewed revealed certain instances of non-compliance with the school’s charter or law, including employee fingerprinting, Open Meetings Law and Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). While the school had a process for fingerprinting teaching staff that was followed with one or two exceptions, janitorial staff had not been fingerprinted and there was no procedure to fingerprint such staff. There was no evidence that the school was aware of its obligations under FOIL, no FOIL notice posted as required, nor the proper implementation of the FOIL policy contained in the school’s charter. As a result, parents and staff do not know of access to the full range of available records available to them and the school is not in a position to respond to requests for records. The school’s Board of Trustees has not properly noticed the media regarding when Board meetings are held, which violates the Open Meetings Law, but has a section in the parent manual that states parents may attend Board meetings. We note that the State Education Department has indicated that as of January 28, 2005, the school was not in compliance with the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) in that the school had not submitted a school safety plan pursuant to Education Law section 2801-a.

While the school had a mixed to poor record of compliance early in its charter, during 2002 and 2003 the school improved significantly and has largely sustained that improvement in its fourth year. In addition, the school never sent a copy of its lease to the Institute prior to the renewal visit, which is a violation of its charter. The school also was deficient with respect to notifying the Institute regarding changes in Board members pursuant to its Monitoring Plan, which is part of its charter. Board minutes were often received from the school later than prescribed in the Monitoring Plan.

With the exceptions noted above, the Board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law and has abided by them.

The school has used different outside counsel to handle different legal matters, in particular, transportation and employment issues. One lawyer sits on the school’s Board, and is also a member of the King Urban Life Center Board. Both the school and the attorney are fully aware of the potential for conflict of interest in this arrangement, and it has not been a problem.

Except as set forth above, the school’s policies and procedures, other internal controls, Board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by Board members and school personnel demonstrate the school’s general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York

Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law (e.g., I.D.E.A., F.E.R.P.A.), its by-laws and the provisions of its charter.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3A
Board Oversight

3A

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

The Board has generally provided effective financial oversight, ensuring that money is available before approving expenditures. The Board does not have a finance committee, but does have a budget committee. A review of a sample of Board minutes provided evidence that the Board has been actively involved with oversight of the school’s finances. The second order of business at every Board meeting (held monthly) is a detailed financial report that is reviewed carefully. This report is a key tool for ensuring that the Board provides appropriate oversight.

The Board has outsourced the financial back-office operations of the school to a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) while maintaining appropriate oversight. The secretary of the Board discusses with the CPA the details of the monthly financial report, which is compiled by the CPA, prior to the Board meeting and prepares a “user-friendly” narrative analysis. The analysis highlights expenses and revenues as well as balance sheet items including cash. This analysis is presented to the Board along with the detailed financial report. The detailed financial report is a budgetary statement of activities that shows total expenses and revenues to date for grants and school operations, as well as the combined totals. The report also compares actual total combined revenues and expenses by line item to the school’s approved budget with the difference shown in a variance column.

As part of its initial statement of financial controls, the Board approved policies related to cash disbursements, cash receipts, bank reconciliations, payroll and the preparation of financial statements. The Board has documented its purchasing procedures in writing and uses a purchase order system. School officials indicated that out of the ordinary expenditures are discussed with the Board. The school could enhance its purchasing practices by adopting a written purchasing policy to provide overall guidance to school personnel.

<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3B</p> <p>The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.</p>
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The school developed a five-year plan as part of its initial charter application. Subsequently, it has prepared and adopted annual budgets for school operations. The budgets have been conservatively developed. For example, the budget for the year ended June 30, 2003 estimated total revenues of \$929,784 while actual revenue totaled \$1,056,928. Total actual revenues have exceeded total actual expenses in three of four years. Actual enrollment for the school has been equal to, or exceeded (within allowable limits), the approved enrollment in its charter.

Generally the budgets have been realistic with conservative assumptions on both the revenue and expense side. However, the school budget that was adopted for FY 2005 year and submitted to the Institute contained an error causing an understatement of health insurance benefit expenses and total expenses. This budget was subsequently revised and has been restated in the school’s renewal application.

The annual budget is developed in conjunction with the School Director, the outside accountant and budget committee. The full Board typically reviews, discusses, modifies and approves the budget over the course of two to three Board meetings. Modifications to the budget are infrequent with the focus on the overall budget rather than on individual line items. A process by which material budget adjustments could be made, as needed, could provide more effective monitoring by the Board.

As noted under Benchmark 3A (Board oversight), the Board monitors the budget closely as revenues and expenses are compared to the budget on a monthly basis. The comparison breaks out grant revenue and expenses from regular school operations. However, these amounts are combined when the comparison to the budget is made. There are occasional instances where the comparison shows wide variances. These variances can be caused by grant expenditures which were not included in the original budget, but which are in fact covered by grant funding. The school should consider whether the way it presents the budgetary comparison could be modified to provide more meaningful information. One way to present the comparison might be to present the budgetary comparison for operating activities separately from the grants. Also, presenting projected expenses and revenues would be helpful, particularly for reports early in the school year.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management’s direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p>
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The school developed internal controls and procedures for purchasing, cash disbursements, cash receipts, payroll, and bank reconciliations in consultation with a Certified Public Accountant. An off-site accountant prepares the financial statements on a monthly basis and reviews them with Board representatives for the Board presentation. Oversight over cash disbursements is strengthened by the practices of attaching supporting documentation to all checks and requiring two signatures for each (the Director and one Board member).

The independent auditor has not issued management letters and, as a result, the school has not needed to follow up on any such comments. Also, the school’s annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. The Board reviews and approves the annual financial statement audit report, although it does not meet separately with the independent auditors.

<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3D</p> <p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p>
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Generally, the school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were generally filed on time with exceptions limited to the first year of its charter. Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor’s opinion, the school’s financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school’s financial statements. However, for its first three audits, neither the financial statements nor the notes to the financial statements presented information about expenses by their functional classification, such as major classes of program services and supporting activities. Such presentation is required by Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) Statement No. 117 (*Financial Statements for Not-for Profit Organizations*). For its fourth annual audit, the financial statements did include this information to help the users of the statements assess the organizations service efforts including the cost of its program and how it uses resources.

FASB Statement No. 117 further encourages, but does not require, organizations such as schools, to provide information about expenses by their natural expense classification. A natural classification of expenses would include such categories as salaries, rent, electricity, depreciation, interest, and professional fees. The school’s statements have presented expenses by their natural classification in each year.

<p>Benchmark 3E</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3E</p> <p>The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p>
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The school completed FY 2004 in stable financial condition. Although the school's total net assets decreased by \$33,063, it finished with total net assets of \$290,185 (\$2,902 per approved enrolled student). Overall, the school's cash position improved by \$73,021. The school's operating activities provided positive cash flow of \$74,125, the school invested in the purchase of property and equipment totaling \$81,103 and borrowed \$80,000 on its line of credit. The school has received negligible contributions to support its operations. In February 2004, the school was notified that it had been awarded a federal Reading First Grant had been awarded in the amount of \$606,552. This three-year grant will provide significant support to the school's reading program for students in grades Kindergarten through three.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$282,689 that consist of land, leasehold and land improvements, office equipment and instructional equipment. The school has no long-term debt. The school leases facilities from the King Urban Life Center, Inc. Rent expense for the year ended June 30, 2004 was \$105,600. The school has a \$200,000 line of credit with a local bank with interest payable at one percent above the bank's prime rate. The outstanding balance at June 30, 2004 was \$80,000 and the interest rate was 5.25 percent.

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

<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Curricular & Assessment Plans</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>The school’s curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable and are likely to improve student learning and achievement.</p> <p>Schools that plan to retain or augment curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have provided evidence that the implementation of that design has resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter.</p> <p>Schools that propose a material redesign to the curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a new charter have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the increased academic performance of children, and a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new curricular design. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Schools that seek to add grade levels not included in the approval of the original charter have presented an outline of the curriculum and specific assessment plans for the term of a future charter. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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In its fifth year, as a result of its Reading First grant, the King Center Charter School has a reading program that is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grades Kindergarten through three. Concurrently, it has put in place an assessment system where performance standards, instruction, student work and assessments are integrated. The effectiveness of this program is promising, but has not been demonstrated. In addition, the alignment of the fourth grade curriculum and assessments, which are not part of the Reading First program, had not been firmly established at the time of the renewal visit. The school has not yet institutionalized support for the delivery of reading instruction, ongoing implementation of the reading assessment system, and professional development in reading. These responsibilities all currently rest with the reading coordinator and the reading coach, both funded through the Reading First grant.

The Scott Foresman math program, with the accompanying math portfolio scope and sequence, has been demonstrably effective in the last two years. The standardized test results all indicate meaningful and consistent gains. Given gains in student performance on the fourth grade science test, the science curriculum appears to be effective. At the time of the renewal visit, there was no evidence of a social studies curriculum.

The school’s curriculum and assessment plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

<p>Benchmark 4B Accountability Plan</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school’s measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school’s proposed Accountability Plan follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.</p>
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King Center Charter School has proposed an Accountability Plan that follows, for the most part, the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State’s testing regimen or revisions to the Institute’s Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

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

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>School Calendar & Enrollment</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction. Additionally, the school has provided an enrollment plan outlining the grades and growth patterns it anticipates during the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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King Center Charter School has provided a school calendar for the current school year. It consists of 185 school days, which represent slightly more school days than the Buffalo City School District. Its daily schedule is 7.5 hours, 1.5 hours longer than that of the city school district. The current key design elements presented in the renewal application assert that the school has extended day and optional extended year learning opportunities. The latter presumably refers to the school's summer program.

King Center proposes to double the size of the school in the next charter, by expanding its Kindergarten and first grade to two classes starting in the 2005-06 school year and then having the enlarged cohorts move through the grades, such that there would be two classes, instead of one, in each grade by 2008-09. In the renewal application, the school contends that adding an additional class of 21 students at each grade level will increase teacher collaboration and establish instructional teams for each grade, allow for specialization especially in the third and fourth grades, provide looping opportunities, and enable the school to move the second through fourth grades from the school's current open space to more appropriate self-contained classrooms to be constructed across the street from the present facility. In addition, the school asserts that an expansion would improve its long-range financial viability and enhance the validity of achievement data for making programmatic decisions.

While an expansion might lead to these outcomes, they also expose the school to the risk of being overwhelmed by the demands of the larger organization. The school has not demonstrated that, as it is currently constituted, it has the infrastructure in place to realize a successful expansion. The curriculum and assessment components of the Reading First grant have not been institutionalized. The school's instructional leadership consists to a great extent of a Reading First reading coach who has no experience as a supervisor and who has daily assessment and intervention responsibilities beyond professional development. While the teachers are competent, they have benefited by having worked together for three years. There is no track record of hiring and training classroom teachers to become competent instructors in a short period. The Director, whose administrative talents have been critically important, would be spread thin by the facility demands. The Board has not demonstrated its ability to set the accountability requirements and performance expectations, necessary for a growing organization. In general given that King Center has not demonstrated its long-term effectiveness, plans for increased enrollment are not reasonable.

<p>Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school’s fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.</p>
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The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period, although it faces challenges concerning its facility expansion. 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, and laws. The school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts. As such, the school’s Board has budgeted conservatively and assumed zero percent increases in its per-pupil funding. The fiscal plan projects that the school’s overall financial position will improve by nearly \$500,000 over the proposed new charter term. This assumes a roll-out of 42 additional students (21 each in Kindergarten and first grades) in the first year of the proposed new charter period and then 21 additional students in Kindergarten in each of the next two years.

A development plan has been prepared by the King Urban Life Center, Inc. to address the facility needs required to meet proposed enrollment growth. The school and the KULC are affiliated with each other by means of overlapping Boards of Directors. The school leases its current space, which is too small to accommodate the expansion, from KULC. The plan is to construct six classrooms and a multi-purpose room across the street from the current location of the school. Given the less-than-arms length relationship between the entities, the costs and terms of any proposed new leases need to be scrutinized by the school’s Board members that are not affiliated with the KULC to avoid the appearance of any actual or perceived conflict of interest. The estimated cost of leasing additional space is included in the school’s fiscal plan starting at \$82,000 and rising by an additional \$42,000 per year in each of the next three years.

From its opening in August 2000, the school has had full enrollment and a waiting list at all grade levels. The number of students on the current waiting list for Kindergarten and first grades are nine and seven, respectively. The school has historically not had to advertise to achieve its enrollment goals.

The school’s proposed five-year fiscal plan uses conservative revenue assumptions that assume no increases for inflation. For example, the school does not project any increases in the per-pupil funding that it receives from the Buffalo City Schools. Also, the Federal Title I funding and special education funding are based on historical amounts received and are increased based on the proposed increase in students.

Generally the assumptions related to expenses are reasonable with a few exceptions. Given the current transportation arrangement with the Buffalo City Schools, the school must pay a portion of the cost of such transportation in each year. However, the fiscal plan does not include these costs. Also, while it has no impact on the overall cash position of the school, the plan appears to understate depreciation expense by \$20,000 or more in each year.