



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

MERRICK ACADEMY QUEENS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL
THIRD YEAR INSPECTION REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The third year inspection to Merrick Academy Queens Public Charter School was conducted on January 15 & 16, 2003 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

- Dr. Karen Laba, Project Manager, SchoolWorks: former middle and high school science teacher, preservice science teacher educator and supervisor, and consultant in accountability system design and implementation for SchoolWorks.
- Janet Schulze, Associate and Project Manager, SchoolWorks: former middle school English Language Arts teacher, high school assistant principal, and superintendent intern; candidate for an Ed. D. in the Urban Superintendents' Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Harrington Gibson, Consultant with SchoolWorks: former fourth grade teacher in Chicago and elementary teacher-coach and administrative intern in the Boston Public Schools; pursuing an Ed. D. in the Teaching and Learning Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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

academic and organizational goals. The team offered a brief oral summary of its findings and recommendations to school leaders and invited them to ask for clarification as needed.

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

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

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

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

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Merrick Academy Queens Public Charter School enrolled its first class of students in September 2000, serving one class of second graders and two classes each of kindergarten and first graders. The school's original five member faculty has grown to 14 classroom teachers and 14 cooperating teachers, supported by three Title I teachers, an art and music teacher and a one-to-one aide. The school is led by the founding principal who delegates operational duties between a site manager, receptionist, and secretary. Supplemental student services are provided by a Special Progress teacher and related service providers for speech therapy, occupational therapy, and a social worker overseen by the Director of Support Services.

The Merrick Academy Queens Public Charter School occupies a renovated commercial building near the center of Queens, NY. The facility is bright and meticulously maintained and comfortably houses the 350 students enrolled for the 2002-2003 school year. Six of the nine members of the Board of Trustees are founding members, with the Merrick principal and the Victory president as ex officio members of the Board.

Merrick contracted with Victory Schools, Inc. to manage its operations, including recruiting and hiring staff, purchasing instructional materials and supplies, monitoring the quality of instruction and providing necessary support and training for faculty. Victory prepares the school budget for review and approval of the Board, and oversees daily operations through frequent contact with building liaison personnel.

The academic program at Merrick is configured around the Direct Instruction programs in literacy and mathematics, and the Core Knowledge sequence for science and social studies. Direct Instruction has been supplemented with writing and literature materials to more closely conform to the expected proficiencies assessed by the New York State assessment system. The Core Knowledge sequence has also been modified to align with the expected topic sequence in the NY State Learning Standards. Additional mathematics resources have been selected to expand problem solving and constructed response experiences for Merrick students.

Merrick Academy Queens Public Charter School has a stable Board, administration and faculty and has established an effective relationship with the Queens community and with the public school district with which it shares responsibility for serving the needs of the children of the area. While most students come from the Queens vicinity, some travel from Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Far Rockaway to access the program offered at the school. The newly renovated building more than adequately serves the needs of the current students and appears to be adequate to support the school's growth over the remaining years of its charter. Hopes are high among all stakeholders that new space will be found to continue to grow beyond its first charter term to provide for middle school and potentially high school students in the future.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

QUESTION 1: To what extent have the students attained expected skills and knowledge?

1. Students at Merrick Academy Queens Charter School rank below the national norm on the spring Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in all but two groups.

Merrick ITBS Scores – Total Battery (NCE)*

| Grade in 2000 | October '00 | May '01 | Within Year Change | May '02 | Across Year Change |
|---------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| K | 46.42 | 49.04 | +2.62 | 41.59 | -7.45 |
| 1 | 27.21 | 41.83 | +14.62 | 44.54 | +2.71 |
| 2 | 39.47 | 43.78 | +4.31 | 41.96 | -1.82 |

Grades K and 1 scores are the average of the two classes of students in each of those grades.

Merrick ITBS Scores – Language Battery (NCE)*

| Grade in 2000 | October '00 | May '01 | Within Year Change | May '02 | Across Year Change |
|---------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| K | 47.22 | 50.49 | +3.27 | 42.70 | -7.79 |
| 1 | 24.14 | 45.56 | +21.42 | 48.36 | +2.8 |
| 2 | 38.10 | 46.39 | +8.29 | 48.26 | +1.87 |

Merrick ITBS Scores – Mathematics Battery (NCE)*

| Grade in 2000 | October '00 | May '01 | Within Year Change | May '02 | Across Year Change |
|---------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| K | 52.14 | 54.76 | +2.62 | 41.93 | -12.83 |
| 1 | 36.87 | 45.40 | +8.53 | 37.84 | -7.56 |
| 2 | 33.67 | 33.61 | -0.06 | 35.26 | +1.65 |

The October '00 administration of the ITBS serves as a baseline indicator of the rank of incoming Merrick students compared to a national sample of students of similar age/grade. According to the total battery results, the strongest group of Merrick students were the 2000 kindergarten class and the weakest, the 2000 group of first graders. Scores at the end of that first school year showed dramatic increase, so that all student groups approached but did not quite meet the national norm (50th percentile). After a second year at Merrick (May '02), ITBS rank remains below the national average but close to the end of year 1 results. The 2000 kindergarten class was strong in the language and mathematics batteries at the end of their first year at Merrick. The first and second grade

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

classes of 2000 strengthened their performance in language nearer the national norm but performed less strongly in mathematics.

- 2. Merrick Academy has its first class of fourth graders this year (2002-2003) and has no data as yet to measure the progress of students toward mastery of the state proficiencies.**

The first battery of state assessments will be administered this winter and spring to the pioneer Merrick fourth grade class.

- 3. While Merrick regularly administers assessments as part of its Direct Instruction program, the results have not been collected and reported in a way that would allow the school to demonstrate changes in student achievement and progress toward language mastery.**

The weekly reporting of student progress toward mastery of particular skills and concepts in the DI language program offers a wealth of diagnostic information to teachers and the DI Director that is used to guide student placement and teaching strategies. If sorted and reported in suitable ways, the DI assessments could provide corroborating information to support less robust assessment data from state assessments or ITBS scores.

QUESTION 2: What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?

- 1. The charts reporting ITBS results in Question 1, Finding 1, show change over the course of a single year for the students at the school. Two of the three classes of students have declined from year to year in rank on the total battery, two have improved their rank slightly in the language subtests, and two have declined in the mathematics battery. With the limitation of one year of data, strong generalizations cannot be reliably claimed, but the current trend appears to be a weakening of performance based on this standardized measure.**

Merrick Academy Queens Public Charter School set a target of a “3 percentile increase in rank” per year on the ITBS. Students in the grade 1 class of 2000 (now in grade 3 for the 2002-2003 academic year) neared that target in total battery and language sections of the ITBS. The current group of fourth graders showed modest gains in rank in the language and mathematics subtests. The 2000 kindergarten class declined in rank between their start in 2000 and their performance as second graders in May 2002. Caution must be urged in interpreting these trends for several reasons: (a) students in grades K and 1 often display dramatic variation in standardized test performance, weakening the ability to claim progress or decline; (b) the average used for the K and 1 scores is not a weighted average, which may distort the overall values used in this chart; and (c) the class groups are not controlled for true cohorts, so there may be new entrants or departures from the original class group. While strong claims of the school’s progress or lack of progress cannot be reliably made, the school can make use of the preliminary data to guide further diagnosis of student strengths and weaknesses.

- 2. Frequent anecdotal reports of evidence of student progress were offered to the inspection team, but by their nature, these reports could not be corroborated in the time allotted to the visit.**

Teachers, parents and Board members cited examples of students making strong progress from a weak beginning while attending Merrick. However, the team could not verify their reports without additional research. In Part II of this report, the team offers recommendations for capturing reliable data from these anecdotes that can be used to support the school's claim of progress.

- 3. As noted in Finding 3, Question 1, the school has a wealth of information on Direct Instruction language performance for its students. To date, however, that data has not been sorted in a way that allows an evaluator to assess individual or group progress over time.**

Teachers assess student achievement after every five lessons have been completed in the DI program. After 20 lessons, teachers assess student mastery of a collection of language skills and concepts. The results of these assessments are used to diagnose student needs and guide instructional strategies. In addition, as discussed earlier and again in Part II, the DI data, if correlated with ITBS or state assessment results, can demonstrate change over time for individuals and for grade levels of students to show progress toward proficiency.

QUESTION 3: Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse students?

- 1. The assessments included in the Direct Instruction curriculum are used to assign students to appropriate instructional groups even across grade levels as needed, supporting the school's mission of individualized instruction.**

According to parents, teachers, and the DI Director from Victory Schools, Inc., the flexibility inherent in the DI language program as implemented at Merrick allows students to be supported or enriched based on their individual needs. Teachers generally have two or three levels of DI students to serve in their class, and the cooperating teacher in each class plays a strong instructional role guiding the independent and small group work of students in the balance of the class while the primary teacher works with the leveled groups. Assessment information is updated approximately weekly, and students are regrouped as indicated by their performance results.

Differentiation in the other areas of instruction was less systematic and observable. Curriculum materials for the Core Knowledge science, social studies, and the blended literacy and mathematics programs show a modest range of variety to accommodate diverse student needs. The team was unable to observe a sufficiently representative sample of these classes to determine if the implementation of the curricula demonstrates the degree of differentiation seen in the literacy program.

2. Merrick Academy employs abundant support services for its students, including push-in and pull-out Title I support, Special Education services, contracted related services such as occupational therapy and speech therapy, a nurse and a social worker.

The staff roster for Merrick Academy Queens Charter School lists seven staff members for student support along with fourteen classroom teachers, fourteen cooperating teachers, three Title I teachers, an art and music teacher and a one to one aide. The ratio of support services to students is more than sufficient to provide for the needs of Merrick students. Coupled with the instructional supervision provided by the principal and the Victory Directors of Curriculum and Direct Instruction, both teachers and students receive

QUESTION 4: Do the school's standards reflect implementation of high academic expectations?

1. A range of samples of student work show corrections and revisions that indicate teachers hold students to high academic expectations. Student behavior was respectful, polite and focused on the tasks expected of them.

In visits to nine of the classes at Merrick, the inspection team noted that state standards and scoring rubrics are posted next to displays of student work. The work appears to reflect a concept or skill described in the learning standard and rubrics were specific to the assignment, though following a similar grading scale. Exemplars are used to exhibit expected quality for different scores. In the student focus group, students used appropriate language and sophisticated explanations to describe the rationale behind the score on their or their classmates' work. While instruction was being conducted, teachers were attentive to errors and students worked to correct mistakes. Cooperating teachers also offered gentle insistence that students correct errors to produce quality products.

There were many examples of the integration of curriculum elements into themed units connected to students' lives. A major Native American topic in social studies was linked with music by a parent who performed Native American songs for the students and to art in the production of Iroquois masks. Writing assignments incorporated content from the study of early American cultures, and teepee cupcakes were a special treat for the younger students. The school's newly elected student council is a functional embodiment of the fourth graders' study of civics and government. Opportunities to write and perform speeches for an audience including classmates as well as local civic leaders gave the students a clear sense of their part in their community.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

QUESTION 1: Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

- 1. The nine parents in the inspection focus group were enthusiastically supportive of the school. Results from formal parent surveys are inconclusive due to the omission of essential information.**

The inspection team heard strong words of support for the work of the school from the parents attending the focus group at Merrick Academy. They praised the quality of the education and the attention to each individual child within a nurturing environment. One parent declared, “They are not just meeting the state standards, they’re meeting *my* standards.”

In addition to the services to their children, parents expressed hearty approval for the school’s communications with the home. They praised the series of workshops conducted by Merrick to inform parents of the aims and methods of the academic program. Weekly progress reports are available, parents are welcome to visit whenever possible, and teachers make contact whenever there is a problem. If parents call, they report their calls are returned promptly. The term “partnership” was repeated often during the hour-long focus group session.

Parents reserved particular praise for the work of the school principal. Several parents in the focus group explained that they applied to the school in order to follow the principal from her former school to the charter school or they knew of her reputation from friends whose children were students of hers. They maintained that her caring attitude was the source of the attitude of care for children that permeates the school’s work.

The formal parent satisfaction survey provided by Victory reports high approval ratings from the respondents. However, strong claims cannot be made because the results do not report the number of surveys distributed, the date and venue of their distributions, the number of responses and the percentage of the total population represented by the respondents. As noted in other sections of this report, the survey items are few and the response options limit respondents’ choices. A broader survey would provide the school with more detailed information on parent concerns. In fact, the principal mentioned that she conducts her own informal survey throughout the year to gather more detailed input from various stakeholders including parents.

- 2. Students in the focus group reiterate their parents’ enthusiastic support of the school.**

The seven students in the focus group during the inspection mentioned the teachers as the ‘best’ thing they like about Merrick Academy Queens Charter School. They described with pleasure the many projects they’ve completed – from career day to a cowboy play and rodeo to a play about ancient Greece. The Native American project in which the older students built a replica of a canoe and primitive hut was described enthusiastically. They praised the variety of reading materials and field trips teachers offer to enrich their curriculum. Several students mentioned with obvious pride their letters to the Better Business Bureau reporting a complaint about poorly made school supplies the

manufacturer refused to replace. Students expressed dislike for the uniforms and the lunches, and indicated the need for a gym and larger cafeteria tables, but overall their experience of the school is a strongly positive one.

QUESTION 2: Are systems in place to promote the efficient management of day-to-day operations in the school?

1. Management and governance systems effectively serve the organizational needs of the students and staff at Merrick Academy Queens Charter School.

The Merrick Board of Trustees and the management company, Victory Schools, Inc., appear to have developed a productive working relationship to manage school functions. Representatives of the Board interviewed during the inspection are experienced in the policy setting role of Board members as a result of their extensive experience serving a variety of civic and community groups. A brief survey of Board minutes and agendas supports their claim that they make final decisions on the direction of the school after receiving input from parents, administrators and Victory personnel. Once decisions are finalized, the Board instructs Victory to implement the policy or practice and evaluates Victory's effectiveness at its tasks. Both Victory representatives and Board members describe their relationship as collaborative.

Management of day to day operations within the building is efficiently managed by the principal and several competent assistants. The site manager serves as the liaison with Victory's Director of Operations, maintaining payroll, inventory, and invoice records, producing reports on financial activities, overseeing building maintenance and district interactions. The secretary tracks student and teacher attendance, communications, and files reports to state and district agencies. The secretary also manages enrollment inquiries and reviews employment applications for compliance with required credentials. These two staff positions free the principal to oversee instruction and to coordinate the subcommittees delegated with developing strategic plans for the whole school community.

To manage the many subsets of activities occurring at the school, the principal has designated a 'cabinet' consisting of representatives of five key committees ("Pillars") to address ideas to enhance the school's climate and operation. Pillar committees have specific goals and objectives within their scope, and may prepare an action plan for new activities for presentation to the cabinet and then to the larger faculty. If the action plan meets approval, the Pillar committee takes on the task of implementing the plan. Distributing leadership and responsibility in this way enhances the viability of Merrick Academy Queens Charter School.

Teachers receive various forms of professional support. Teachers reported the DI Coordinator and Director of Curriculum demonstrate lessons in their classes. On a monthly basis, the DI Coordinator along with other Victory staff conduct observations and provide specific written feedback on the teachers' implementation of DI. Teachers also spoke of the principal's frequent classroom visits and supportive feedback as well as her more formal evaluation visits. Teachers in the same grade level often plan together to coordinate lessons or to help each other with lesson ideas. For example, two teachers

reported how they each observed the other in order to learn from the other's strengths. One is particularly adept at forming and coordinating the student groups, so the other teacher, who was struggling with that, observed her classroom. The other's strength is in teaching writing, the observance of which benefited the other teacher.

Merrick also has systems in place to serve student support needs. The Director of Student Support Services oversees Title I and special education programs and contracts for related services such as speech and occupational therapy. Assuring the prompt diagnosis and implementation of needed student services collaboratively between the Queens Community School District and Merrick Academy is a complex and demanding task that is functioning effectively in the support of students.

QUESTION 3: Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and adjust it as needed?

- 1. Regular progress reports to program coordinators and analysis of the correlation between the academic program as originally designed and the requirements of the New York State Assessment system have led to thoughtful modifications of the curriculum to better serve student's needs.**

As noted earlier, Merrick teachers frequently assess student progress using Direct Instruction tests, which are then reported weekly to the Victory Director of Direct Instruction for review and analysis. This analysis is used to guide student grouping and instructional pacing in a systematic and structured way. In addition, the Merrick management team from Victory Schools conducted an analysis of the expectations of the NY State assessments and identified areas where the Direct Instruction and Core Knowledge programs did not provide sufficient practice in required skills and competencies. In response to the analysis, the school added a writing component to the literacy curriculum and additional problem solving and mathematical writing experiences to the mathematics curriculum. In response to teacher feedback coupled with the assessment analysis, Merrick adjusted the sequence of topics in the Core Knowledge program for science and social studies to align better with the New York State proficiencies. As described earlier, teachers exhibit student work with the state standard the work addresses and the rubric used to assess mastery.

- 2. The school's analysis of its standardized test data has limited the ability of the school to assess the effectiveness of its programs. The analysis of the ITBS results have not been reported in a way that allows the school to monitor the progress of continuing students and make inferences about the quality of their academic program.**

The consultant hired by Victory to analyze Merrick's ITBS results has reported the results of students achieving "at or above the 50th percentile" rather than the normal curve equivalent (NCE) rank that would provide clearer indications of changes in performance over time for Merrick students. In addition, Merrick's Accountability Progress Report describes the performance of class groups that include new entrants as well as students who have been enrolled at Merrick for several years, making it difficult to draw accurate

inferences about the impact of the school's programs on student progress. The ITBS data is sufficient to conduct a more precise analysis if the school chooses to use its student results to gauge its own performance.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

QUESTION 1: Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

- 1. All stakeholder groups mentioned the phrase, "All children can learn," as a central element of the Merrick mission. While not part of the written mission, there was frequent mention (and examples) of the partnership between families and the school as a distinctive feature of the Merrick experience.**

The belief that all children can learn was among the most frequently mentioned descriptions of the purposes and unique aspects of Merrick Academy Queens Charter School. Parents in the focus group reported their perception that everyone at the school works to the best interests of each child. One parent commented that this school aims to be "an exciting place for children and a welcoming place for parents." Board members and administrators described their decisions and planning efforts focused on the needs of the children of Queens whose parents choose the school as an option. Teachers described their concern for the progress of each child as part of their own motivation and reasons for commitment to the school. The inspection team noted that a symmetrical relationship exists between the Board, school personnel, the management company, and parents which characterizes the operational decisions that have been made at Merrick and promotes the effectiveness of their implementation.

In addition, the team heard a common vision and hope that Merrick will be able to grow to a K-12 organization in the future. While not a specific component of the school's original charter, discussions are underway to explore the possibility of expanding the original vision.

QUESTION 2: Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?

- 1. Merrick Academy Queens Charter School is making generally strong progress toward providing the special programs it promised in its charter.**

The Merrick charter and accountability plan mention five unique aspects of their program: (1) an extended day; (2) individualized attention; (3) research based instructional program; (4) art and music programs; and (5) civic and community based projects. The Merrick school day continues until 4 pm, longer than the regular day in local district elementary schools. To accommodate parents' work schedules, the school entered into an agreement with another agency to offer a fee-based after school program that complements the school's programs by offering enrichment and remedial support along with recreational experiences for students.

As noted in previous findings in this report, the educational program monitors individual progress and accommodates individual needs through frequent assessment and regrouping of students at appropriate instructional levels, both within and across grade levels. The “research based instructional program” that forms the foundation of Merrick’s curriculum is Direct Instruction for literacy and mathematics, and Core Knowledge for science and social studies. While these two programs have been supplemented in specific areas, the core program remains faithful to the original charter ideals.

With the support of an active and skilled parent group, Merrick has been able to institute vibrant and meaningful music and art programs. The parent group raised funds to purchase 20 music keyboards, allowing the school to offer piano lessons to third and fourth graders for half the year, and to kindergarten and second graders during the alternate months. First graders receive choral music instruction one day per week. Third and fourth graders also receive art instruction twice per week. Special art programs throughout the year reinforce the school’s efforts to promote understanding and appreciation for the fine arts. Examples of student artwork, professionally matted and framed by a parent, hang throughout the school as a testament to the school’s appreciation of the arts.

Merrick administrators and Board members have made a strong effort to promote civic and community awareness among the students. The principal and staff structured the recent student council elections to follow the conventions of realistic political campaigns. Candidates for grade level representative solicited the required number of signatures of support from their classmates (even the kindergarten hopefuls!), prepared and presented campaign speeches, and were “sworn in” in the presence of parents and local civic leaders. In addition to the practical experience of civic responsibility associated with the student council election process, students at Merrick also participate in a partnership with a school in Haiti, exchanging letters and stories with the other students.

Overall, Merrick Academy Queens Charter School has maintained a focus on its special programs and, with the help of a strong parent group and committed Board and faculty, the school is able to provide a worthwhile and meaningful experience for its children.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Merrick Academy Queens Charter Schools lists four academic program goals in its accountability plan.

Goal 1: “All students will become proficient in reading and writing of the English language.”

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Each cohort of MAQCS students will increase national rank by 3 percentiles on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) reading battery. (*cohort will include all eligible students*).

measure 2: MAQCS “performance index” on NYS ELA assessments will meet or exceed state standards, including only those students at Merrick for two or more years.

measure 3: A greater percentage of MAQCS students enrolled for two or more years will perform at or above level 3 on NYS ELA assessment than students in ‘similar schools’ (*similar schools are named in the school’s progress report*).

Goal 2: “All students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of mathematics computation and problem solving.”

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Each cohort of MAQCS students will increase national rank by three percentiles on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) mathematics battery. (*cohort will include all eligible students*).

measure 2: MAQCS “performance index” on NYS math assessments will meet or exceed state standards, including only those students at Merrick for two or more years.

measure 3: A greater percentage of MAQCS students enrolled for two or more years will perform at or above level 3 on NYS math assessment than students in ‘similar schools.’

Goal 3: “All students at MAQCS will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.”

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Sixty percent of students at MAQCS for three years or more will perform at or above grade level on the Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced tests administered every other year.

measure 2: MAQCS students will meet or exceed state standards on the NYS Science assessment.

measure 3: A greater percentage of MAQCS students enrolled for two or more years will perform at or above level 3 on NYS science assessment than students in similar schools.

Goal 4: “All students at MAQCS will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of social, geographical, civic and world studies.”

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Sixty percent of students at MAQCS for three years or more will perform at or above grade level on the Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced tests administered every other year.

measure 2: MAQCS students will meet or exceed state standards on the NYS social studies assessment.

measure 3: A greater percentage of MAQCS students enrolled for two or more years will perform at or above level 3 on NYS social studies assessment than will students in similar schools.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance the quality of evidence to be used to assess its progress toward its own goals.

For both Goals 1 (ELA) and 2 (Mathematics):

1. Report actual NCE (normal curve equivalent) scores on ITBS test results as required by the *Accountability Plan Guidelines* published by the Charter Schools Institute (see Part I of this report). Currently, the school reports percentage of students scoring above the 50th percentile. An additional enhancement would be to correct earlier reports of ITBS results by listing NCE scores for all classes since the school’s opening.
2. Report the scores of true cohorts of students each year at Merrick. The progress of true cohorts is a required performance measure and allows the school as well as external evaluators to assess the influence of the school’s programs over time. Merrick may also include scores for whole grade level groups in the annual progress report, but should clearly distinguish between the results for the reader.
3. When showing ITBS results over time for true cohorts, show progress toward the “3 percentile increase in rank” defined in the MAQCS accountability plan. Explicitly state whether the school has met its standard as measured by this indicator. If desired, offer an explanation for greater than expected or less than expected growth. Link the explanation closely to the performance results.
4. Scores achieved on the NYS assessments by fourth graders in the ‘similar schools’ cited for comparison by Merrick’s accountability plan are available and should be collected by the school’s leaders and communicated with staff and curriculum support personnel to provide an accurate target for planning and preparation tasks.
5. In addition to the measures included in its accountability plan, Merrick should consider complementing that data with achievement summaries for its internal assessments for the Direct Instruction program. The DI data is gathered regularly and could be summarized by absolute grade level performance as well as showing longitudinal progress for individual students. If Merrick school leaders and management partners can demonstrate a correlation between its DI measures and those on the ITBS or state assessments, the DI measures could be a strong source of evidence for the progress of Merrick students toward high standards.

6. Merrick faculty capture evidence of student growth through portfolios collected throughout the year. If scored according to a common rubric and using consistent standards across teachers, these measures of student progress can be a useful complement to the school's other performance measures. School leaders and faculty might consider developing a consistent scoring system for portfolios, logs and projects and collecting that information both individually and school-wide to show the growth in competency as a result of Merrick's academic efforts.

For Goal 3 (science) and Goal 4 (social studies):

7. In light of revisions in the Merrick science and social studies curricula, the Core Knowledge examinations are no longer appropriate measures of student achievement. According to Victory curriculum directors, alternative tests are under development. The school is advised to inform the Charter Schools Institute of the proposed change in this accountability plan measure, and to request guidance on the development of the new measure to assure that the revised tool will be an acceptable alternative.
8. Consider raising the performance standard on the science and social studies goal above sixty percent. The overall goal states, "All students will demonstrate. . ." and the school would be well served to match its target passing rate to its claim of high expectations for excellence.
9. In some comparison groups, the school intends to include students at MAQCS greater than two years, in other measures, only those students at MAQCS greater than three years. It is unclear why the two different criteria are used in different measures, whether inadvertent or intentional. If intentional, an explanation added to the progress report would help evaluators understand the school's reasons for its choices. When using only students at the school for three years or more, the school limits the number of students included in the comparison group and reduces the robustness of the school's results. The school is advised to consider these factors when structuring its case for renewal.
10. In addition to its existing measures, there appear to be report card grades and ITBS results in science and social studies for some groups of Merrick students. While the new formal assessments are being developed, the school might consider collecting summary information on student achievement using the school's internal teacher developed measures to provide at least some evidence of the school's progress toward its achievement goals in these areas.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS

Merrick Academy Queens Charter School offers two organizational viability goals within its accountability plan.

Goal 1: "... demonstrate strong organizational viability by maintaining strong parental support and commitment to the school."

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Greater than seventy percent of respondents will report "good" or "excellent" on a yearly parent survey.

measure 2: Maintain enrollment equal to or greater than ninety percent capacity, and a waiting list equal to or exceeding ten percent of population.

measure 3: Average daily attendance rate will be ninety percent or better.

Goal 2: “. . . demonstrate strong organizational viability by maintaining sound financial practices.”

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Yearly budgets show proper allocation of resources to ensure effective school programs.

measure 2: Yearly balance sheets show that school is fiscally sound and maintains adequate cash reserves.

measure 3: Audited financial statements will demonstrate that the school is responsible and prudent with public resources.

ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance the quality of evidence used to assess its progress toward its own goals.

Related to Goal 1: parent support

1. The parent survey used by Merrick is brief and limits the range of topics and responses available to respondents. The information gathered from the survey is of limited use to the school in making reliable inferences about parent concerns. The school might consider expanding the range and number of questions on the survey as well as the range of responses to elicit adequate feedback to guide decision-making. The principal reported that she conducts an informal survey at irregular intervals. Her survey items may be suitable for inclusion and use on a more regular and systematic manner.
2. When reporting survey results, it is customary to report the number of surveys distributed, the date and venue of distribution, the number of responses received, and the percentage of the population represented by the responses. It is helpful to solicit survey responses from a variety of venues to broaden the likely response pool (for instance, distributing at drop-off and pick-up times as well as at PTA meetings).
3. In addition to the stated measure of the parent survey, Merrick has available a generous collection of attendance data at school events, parent volunteer hours and services, and fund raising efforts and results. The school might consider including these additional sources of evidence of parent support to supplement the report of survey results. If gathered faithfully, trends over time might be used to show increases in parent support.
4. A more persuasive presentation of the strength of school enrollment data would include a table showing changes in enrollment and waiting list membership over the course of the school's history. The inspection team was confused by the definition of a target of 90% enrollment along with maintenance of a waiting list. The school might want to explain its purpose in setting a target of less than 100% of capacity when a waiting list exists. In addition to gross enrollment figures, student persistence over time (continuing enrollees) can provide evidence of commitment to the school, and charts tracking reasons for student withdrawals or non-re-enrollment can enhance the school's claim of overall acceptance and support.
5. The target set by Merrick for its average daily attendance (90%) is the minimum state requirement for elementary schools. Since the school aims to be one of the “finest public schools in America” it might consider raising its attendance target to a higher level. Showing

attendance rates over time and perhaps comparing MAQCS attendance with the rates at similar schools can enhance the evaluator's understanding of the school's ability to provide a viable alternative for the Queens community.

6. While the school does not include strong staff support as a measure of its organizational viability, Merrick's history of a stable staff is an attribute that contributes to the school's durability. A mention of data indicating staff support as a complement to parent support of the school might be helpful to evaluators.

Related to Goal 2: sound financial practices

7. The school's chart showing allocation of budget funds in the *2002 Accountability Progress Report* is informative and helpful in identifying what the school considers "proper allocation of resources." It would be helpful to add a category in the chart for professional development, an area mentioned in the charter school law (Education Law §2850 (2) – referenced in the introduction to this report). Also, readers might be guided by a definition of items the school considers "direct educational expenses."
8. While not mentioned explicitly in the school's accountability plan, expansion of the school's facilities was a major topic of concern among school leaders. A brief mention of this topic and discussion of the financial needs for expansion would be a helpful addition to the 2003 progress report.
9. The school might consider adding an example of what it considers 'adequate cash reserves' and perhaps describe a situation in which the cash reserves might be used.
10. Since readers of the school's accountability progress report are not always financial professionals, it would be helpful for the school to include its own definition of "responsible and prudent" in its discussion of its use of available resources.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS

Merrick Academy Queens Charter School offers two goals for its unique programmatic areas in its accountability plan.

Goal 1: "Students at MAQCS will develop knowledge an appreciation of art and music."

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Greater than seventy percent of respondents will report "good" or "excellent" on a yearly parent survey asking whether the school has improved their child's knowledge and appreciation of art and music.

Goal 2: "Students at MAQCS will demonstrate strength of character and concern for others by participation in class-wide and community-based civics projects and by demonstrating appropriate classroom and school-wide behavior."

Measures proposed by the school:

measure 1: Ninety percent of students participate in projects and maintain logs and portfolios of their work.

measure 2: Seventy percent of parents will report their child's growth in responsibility, self control, and concern for others is "good" or "excellent."

measure 3: Seventy percent of classroom teachers will rate classroom behavior “excellent” or “good”

measure 4: Seventy percent of Task Force participants will evaluate overall student behavior at the school as “excellent” or “good” when conducting full day visits each Fall and Spring.

UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance the quality of evidence to assess its progress toward its own goals.

For Goal 1: knowledge and appreciation for art and music

1. Parent survey information is a limited source of evidence for achievement of this goal (see previous recommendations on reporting survey results). In addition to a more thorough survey of parent opinions, the school can consider providing details of the presentations and events its students achieve in music and the arts as supporting evidence of their achievement of “appreciation and understanding of” the arts and music. In addition, the school can collect internal information from teacher created assessments to show change in knowledge and proficiency over time.

For Goal 2: civics projects and behavior

2. MAQCS has collected some student logs and portfolios of civics projects, it has not collated the scores on these projects in a way that will allow them to be reported to demonstrate growth in student learning as a result of their work in these activities. The accountability plan indicates that a sample portfolio would be included with the *Accountability Progress Report*, but none has been included to date. A report of rubric scores on the projects by individual and averaged by class can be a useful supplement to the measures already planned for this goal.
3. The target for the measure of student achievement of this goal lists 90% of students participating. A more exceptional target would be to aim for a larger percentage of student participation than currently listed.
4. The survey in current use offers limited data on which to make valid inferences about the school’s progress toward achievement of its behavior goal. The school might consider additional survey items and broader response choices to gather more useful information on the growth of student character and self control. Also, as noted in an earlier recommendation, the survey results should include the number of respondents and the percentage of the population represented by the response pool.
5. The school has yet to gather teacher feedback on student behavior. It is advisable for the school to initiate efforts to gather teacher reports on student behavior to maintain compliance with its accountability plan. In addition to teacher reports, the school can consider reporting instances of student discipline referrals and suspensions to demonstrate improvement in behavior.
7. The Task Force described in the Merrick accountability plan has not been initiated. It would be advisable for the school to explain its omission and to define its plans for gathering independent evidence of its progress toward this goal.

APPENDIX A: FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PROGRESS

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

**** Sections assessing the school in the areas of Financial Accountability and Legal Compliance will be provided by the Charter Schools Institute and amended to this report as available.**

**APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR
MERRICK ACADEMY QUEENS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL**

I. Academic Program Goals

| | |
|---|--|
| Goal 1: All students proficient in reading and writing of the English language. | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| -- each cohort improve by average of 3 percentile per year in national rank on ITBS | -- report actual NCE for each grade -- report 'true' cohorts as required by CSI definition on all reports -- show calculations that directly present the growth target in your acc. plan goal -- demonstrate academic performance by presenting DI reading results for each student at the school, both absolute as well as longitudinal; show whether student achievement on DI assessments correlates with performance on ITBS -- include summaries of reliably scored student portfolios to complement other measures |
| -- MAQCS students > 2 years at MAQCS will = or + state standards on NYS ELA test | |
| -- greater % MAQCS students (enrolled > 2 years) will score > 3 on NYS ELA than in 'similar schools' | |
| Goal 2: Students will demonstrate competency in understanding and application of mathematics computation and problem solving | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| -- each cohort improve by average of 3 percentile per year in national rank on ITBS | -- report actual NCE for each grade -- report 'true' cohorts as required by CSI definition on all reports -- show calculations that directly present the growth target in your accountability plan goal |
| -- MAQCS students > 2 years at MAQCS will = or + state standards on NYS math test | |
| -- greater % MAQCS students (enrolled > 2 years) will score > 3 on NYS ELA than in 'similar schools' | |
| Goal 3: Students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning. | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| -- 60% students at MAQCS >= 3 years perform at or above grade level on Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced Tests administered every other year | -- submit a revision or report change in measure to CSI ASAP -- continue the development of a reliable assessment of student skill and knowledge of scientific reasoning to replace CK tests (explore possibilities of assessments from curriculum programs) -- consider raising expected performance above 60% target -- report current internal assessment summaries by grade for science |
| -- meet or exceed state standards for public school performance on NYS Science assessment | |
| -- greater %age of MACQS students > 2+ years perform above level 3 on NYS Assessments than similar schools | |
| Goal 4: Students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of social, geographical, civic and world issues. | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| -- 60% students at MAQCS >= 3 years perform at or above grade level on Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced Tests administered every other year | -- submit a revision or report change in measure to CSI ASAP -- continue the development of a reliable assessment of student skill and knowledge of scientific reasoning to replace CK tests (explore possibilities of assessments from curriculum programs) -- consider raising expected performance above 60% target -- report current internal assessment summaries by grade for social studies |
| -- meet or exceed state standards for public school performance on NYS Science assessment | |
| -- greater %age of MAQCS students > 2+ years perform above level 3 on NYS Assessments than similar schools | |

II. Organizational Viability Goals

| Goal 1: Demonstrate strong parental support and commitment | |
|---|--|
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 70% of parents surveyed will choose 'good' or 'excellent' for school performance -- enrollment meet or exceed 90% capacity with a waiting list = or > 10% of population -- average daily attendance 90% or better | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- expand survey questions and aligning response choices to goal statements (see III) because inadequate as currently written -- report the number of surveys distributed, # returned, percentage of population reflected in responses -- consider additional measures of parent support, including changes in frequency over time -- provide a more detailed list of enrollment over time, wait list over time, new entrants, rates of persistence (retention), etc. -- provide own attendance report for each year of operation, give reader some context by offering comparison with rates of surrounding district -- consider setting higher target for attendance than state minimum |
| Goal 2: Maintaining sound financial practices. | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- proper allocation of resources to ensure effective school programs -- adequate cash reserves -- audited financial statements will demonstrate 'responsible and prudent' use of funds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- chart on '02 Progress Report helpful -- add category for professional development expenditures -- define items considered 'direct educational expenses' -- discuss financial arrangements for expansion plans -- clarify for readers how school defines 'responsible and prudent' in discussion of progress on this goal |

III. Unique Programmatic Area Goals

| Goal 1: students will develop knowledge and appreciation for art and music. | |
|---|--|
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 70% parents on yearly survey report "good" or "excellent" on child's knowledge of art and music | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- survey item does not correspond with responses described in this goal statement -- (see previous recommendations for reporting response rate and percentage of population information) -- expand description of events and performances to demonstrate student achievement in arts and music |
| Goal 2: students will demonstrate care and concern by participating in class wide and community based civics projects and demonstrating appropriate classroom and school-wide behavior. | |
| <i>Proposed Measures</i> | <i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- 90% students participate in projects and maintain logs and portfolios scored by rubric -- 70% parents respond child's growth in responsibility, respect and self-control is improved -- 70% classroom teachers rate classroom and school-wide behavior 'excellent' or 'good' -- 70% on Parent Task Force rate behavior as 'good' or 'excellent' in site visits each fall and spring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- report a summary of average logs/ portfolio scores by grade or by individual students to demonstrate achievement -- raise the percentage of students participating to 97% or higher -- revise survey to correct misalignment and omissions; -- as before, note number of responses received, percentage of parents/caregivers represented by response pool -- consider other measures such as number and rate of suspensions, discipline referrals, etc. to corroborate survey data -- Task Force not initiated, discuss on next Acc. Progress Report; initiate Task Force before end this year and begin compiling data |