



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Subsequent Renewal Report

Amber Charter School

January 4, 2010

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

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

REPORT INTRODUCTION

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

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

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation

Full-Term Renewal

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve the Application for Subsequent Renewal of the Amber Charter School and renew its charter for a period of five years with authority to provide instruction to students in kindergarten through 5th grade with a maximum enrollment of 425 students, and consistent with the other terms set forth in its Application for Subsequent Renewal.

Background and Required Findings

According to the SUNY Renewal Practices:

In subsequent renewal reviews, and in contrast to initial renewal reviews, the State University Trustees evaluate the strength and effectiveness of a school’s academic program almost exclusively by the degree to which the school has succeeded in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period. This approach is consistent with the greater time that a school has been in operation and a concomitant increase in the quantity and quality of student achievement data that the school has generated. It is also consistent with the Act’s purpose of moving from a rules-based to an outcome-based system of accountability in which schools are held accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

Amber Charter School has applied for a Subsequent, Full-Term Renewal of five years. In its tenth year of operation, the SUNY Renewal Practices provide only two possible renewal outcomes for Amber Charter School: Full-Term Renewal or Non-Renewal. In order to earn a Full-Term Renewal, Amber Charter School must demonstrate that it has met the criteria for such a renewal as described in the SUNY Renewal Practices. Specifically, the school must demonstrate that it “has met or come

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

close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period,” or it must face Non-Renewal. Based on the Institute’s review of the evidence that it gathered and that Amber Charter School has provided including, but not limited to, the school’s Application for Subsequent Renewal, evaluation visits conducted during the charter period, a renewal evaluation visit conducted during the final year of the charter period, and the school’s record of academic performance as determined by the extent to which it has met its academic Accountability Plan goals, the Institute finds that the school has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period.”²

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

Therefore, in accordance with the standard for subsequent renewal found in the SUNY Renewal Practices, the Institute recommends that the SUNY Trustees approve Amber Charter School’s Application for Charter Renewal and renew the charter for a full term of five years.

Consideration of School District Comments

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

Summary Discussion

Academic Success

Amber Charter School is meeting its key Accountability Plan goals in English language arts and mathematics. While the school has had a mixed record of performance during the Accountability Period, and at times was not close to meeting its English language arts and mathematics goals, most recently, the school has improved its performance substantially and is meeting all measures for both goals. Based on limited data, the school has also met its science and social studies goals during the Accountability Period. According to the state’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system, the school is deemed to be in good standing.

On the state’s English language arts exam, Amber’s absolute performance has improved over the previous three years and the school achieved its absolute target for the first time in 2008-09³. The school has consistently exceeded the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state’s NCLB accountability system and outperformed the local school district. In comparison to demographically

² SUNY Renewal Practices, Full-Term Renewal standard (9).

³ In interpreting a school’s year-to-year changes in the absolute measure, the Institute puts the results in the context of overall state-wide changes. In general, the state-wide proficiency rate on the English language arts exam increased by five percent from 2006-07 to 2007-08 and by nine percent from 2007-08 to 2008-09. From a related perspective, the median school had a proficiency rate of 68.7 percent, 72.8 percent, and 80.9 percent during the three years respectively. These year-to-year changes suggest the importance of the comparative measures included in the goal.

similar public schools state-wide, Amber performed about the same as expected in 2005-06, considerably better than expected in 2006-07, and lower than expected in 2007-08. In the most recent year, the school performed better than expected to a large degree. With respect to year-to-year growth, one of three grade level cohorts achieved its target on the state exam in 2006-07 and overall performance improved. In 2007-08, none of the cohorts achieved their target and overall performance declined. In 2008-09, both cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance improved substantially.

Amber is meeting its mathematics goal and has improved its performance throughout the Accountability Period. In 2005-06, when the state mathematics exam was first administered in 3rd through 6th grades, the school scored well below its absolute target. In 2006-07 and 2007-08, Amber's performance improved. In the most recent year, the school posted a near perfect proficiency rate and the school achieved its target for the first time⁴. Throughout the Accountability Period, in comparison to demographically similar schools, Amber's performance has varied, with the school performing lower than expected until the most recent year when it first met its Effect Size target. Relative to the local school district, Amber's performance has been similarly uneven, having underperformed the district in two out of the last four years. However, in the most recent year Amber outperformed the district by a wide margin. In terms of growth, in 2006-07, when two years of state test data became available, only one cohort achieved its target and overall performance remained nearly level. In 2007-08, none of the school's cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance declined. In the most recent year, both cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance greatly improved.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school was guided by strong instructional leadership which provided a comprehensive and ongoing system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness based on classroom visits and an individual teacher goal-setting process. School leaders have established an environment of high expectations for student achievement and teacher performance. The leadership team has conducted regular reviews of the academic program, identified deficiencies using the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, and made necessary changes as a result of these reviews. Instructional leaders have organized a coherent and sustained professional development program that is designed to address school-wide and individual needs. The content of the professional development program at Amber Charter School dovetails with the school's curricular programs, and is directly related to the school's instructional practices. Likely a direct result of the school's strong instructional leadership in the latter portion of the charter period is the significant improvement in the school's performance toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.

The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve student learning. The school regularly administers useful assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and has begun to develop procedures to collect and analyze systematically their results in order to identify students in need of academic intervention services, develop instructional groupings, and target supplemental tutoring services. School leaders have also used assessment data to make changes to the school's curriculum. Finally, the school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians and overall school performance to the broader school community.

⁴ In interpreting a school's year-to-year changes in the absolute measure, the Institute puts the results in the context of overall state-wide changes. In general, the statewide proficiency rate on the mathematics exam increased by nearly six percent from 2006-07 to 2007-08 and by eight percent from 2007-08 to 2008-09. From a related perspective, the median school had a proficiency rate of 79.5 percent, 86.2 percent, and 90.8 percent during the three years respectively. These year-to-year changes in absolute results suggest the importance of the comparative measures included in the goal.

In the second and third years of the charter period, Amber Charter School did not have a well-defined curriculum aligned to state learning standards and performance indicators. At the time, the curriculum was not aligned from grade to grade. However, late in the charter period, the school has put in place a curriculum framework for English language arts and mathematics that is aligned to state learning standards. Teachers have access to these curricular documents to guide the development of their lesson plans. The school has also defined a procedure for teachers to undertake ongoing review and revision of the curriculum, as well as the development of new curricular resources.

While the quality of instruction at the school has varied substantially throughout the first part of the charter period, observers noted much improvement in the past two years consistent with the appointment of the current school leader. High quality instruction was evident in many of the school's classrooms late in the charter period. Teachers plan purposeful lessons that are directly linked to state learning standards and clearly identify what students are expected to know and be able to do within each lesson. Inspectors noted that some teachers have not adequately maximized instructional time and have not posed to their students the type of challenging questions that promote depth of understanding, and the development of higher-order and problem-solving skills.

At the time of the renewal visit, instruction in the school's classrooms was differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school's student population. Amber has deployed extensive resources to provide academic interventions for students at-risk of academic failure throughout the charter period. The school has clear procedures for identifying these students as well as those with disabilities. The school utilizes a tiered system of instructional interventions for at-risk students, including those students with Individualized Education Programs and English language learners.

Organizational Effectiveness and Viability

The school has been faithful to its mission over the course of the charter period and has implemented the key design elements in its charter. School stakeholders are familiar with the school's mission to "provide comprehensive learning experiences that will enable all students to become fully educated, creative adults, prepared to play leadership roles in New York City and in our global society." In conversation with inspectors during the renewal visit, parents described the school's focus as "to prepare students to be lifelong learners" and "to offer a well-rounded curriculum." Additionally, teachers were well aware of the school's mission, which the school is proposing to maintain for the next charter period.

Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school. The school evaluates parent satisfaction by using the New York City Department of Education's School Survey. Recent survey results, with a 79 percent response rate, indicate that 97 percent of parents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their child's education. During the renewal visit, parents expressed appreciation for the "open lines of communication at every level of the school" and the school's "compassionate and communicative teachers."

Amber Charter School has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program. Day-to-day operations are competently managed, and the priorities of the school's leadership are clearly aligned to the school's mission and Accountability Plan goals. The school's organizational structure supports distinct lines

of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the school had made significant progress during the charter period in hiring and retaining key personnel. Finally, the school has maintained adequate student enrollment over the course of the charter period and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school.

The school board has worked effectively to oversee the educational program and achieve the school's mission. The board has adequate skills and expertise to provide oversight to the school. The school board fulfills its responsibilities through a traditional committee structure and understands the core business of the school – academic achievement – in sufficient depth to be effective. It has also been quite stable, with the same chairperson and secretary for at least five years. The school board conducts regular evaluations of the school leader, as well as an on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, which has resulted in the identification of areas for continued improvement.

Again in the current charter period, Amber Charter School's board of trustees has demonstrated its willingness to respond to evidence and to take responsibility for improving the quality of the academic program. When the school's student achievement results decreased, the school board wanted more instructional experience within the school's classrooms and implemented a master teacher position with an increased salary. The board also shifted funds from capital pursuits and placed them into improving the educational program. Similarly, when the school board was facing leadership difficulties it made changes that were informed by achievement data.

In 2006-07, the school experienced an enrollment decrease and reduced its planned enrollment slightly through a charter revision. As a K-6 school, school leaders realized that Amber was retaining very few 6th graders given the 6th through 8th grade middle school structure in the City; families of 5th grade students were exercising their choice options in other New York City charter and district schools. As a result, the school discontinued teaching the 6th grade in the 2008-09 school year. While the Institute characterized the foregoing as an appropriate response to market conditions, the school failed to properly request a charter revision as part of making its determination. The Institute clarified the revision process and the charter was appropriately revised, with the approval of the State University Trustees, just after the beginning of the 2008-09 school year.

Amber's Application for Renewal indicated that they were discussions about growing the school to add a full middle school program at some point, however, the board realizes that continued enhancement of the education program, facilities and fundraising are necessary prerequisites.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the school's initial renewal, the school was deficient with respect to certain elements of compliance including notification under its charter regarding trustee changes, Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) compliance, adherence to minor elements of the Open Meetings Law, provision of alternative instruction and special education services, and obtaining proper background checks on prospective employees prior to hiring. Over the course of the current charter term, most, if not all, of these issues have been remedied by the school.

The school board stated that the school's previous co-management structure and resulting lack of clarity with parents resulted in a high number of complaints during the initial charter term, however, that situation has improved significantly in the current charter term. The Institute issued a remedial order related to FOIL in 2006. Since that time the Institute has not received any formal complaints about the school.

While the State Education Department found in July 2009 that the school had insufficient instructional time, the board disputed that finding and stated that it negotiated two additional periods of instructional time with the United Federation of Teachers during the charter term. Based on the schedules presented in the school's Application for Renewal, the school appeared to have sufficient instructional time.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the renewal inspection visit and throughout the current charter term, the school appears to have been, and presently appears to be, generally in compliance with the Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, rules and regulations, applicable federal law and its by-laws. Lastly, the school board makes appropriate use of in-house and other legal counsel.

Fiscal Soundness

Amber's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) has developed realistic budgets with appropriate input from the principal/school leader, other key staff, and the school board. Variances are routinely analyzed by the CFO and finance staff and material variances are discussed with the treasurer and finance committee of the board. With critical financial needs of the school being dependent on student enrollment, the CFO and finance committee monitor student enrollment closely to ensure budget projections can be met. In addition, the school has developed an adequate long-term budget for the next charter term using conservative assumptions when budgeting revenue. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.

The school has maintained appropriate written fiscal policies, procedures and controls related to external and internal compliance for cash disbursements, cash receipts, bank reconciliations, payroll, fixed assets, grants/contributions, and the preparation of financial statements. The CFO works with the school's principal and management team along with and the school board to ensure that the policies and procedures are documented and followed by school staff. The school's Fiscal Year ("FY") 2008-09 audit report on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants disclosed one non-compliance issue. It was determined by auditors that the school did not comply with eligibility requirements for the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program. The lack of other deficiencies in the reports provides some, but not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures.

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

Amber has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. The school completed the FY 2009 school year in stable financial condition. Total net assets increased, as did the school's cash reserve, allowing the school to ensure that it has sufficient cash available to pay current bills and other payables that are shortly due, with the exception of a pending facility balloon payment. The school, which has short- and long-term debt, attributable to the school's facility obligations, will explore refinancing given its

inability to pay for an upcoming balloon payment. The school has a negative working capital ratio, indicating it does not have enough short-term assets possibly to cover all immediate liabilities and short-term debt. The school board expressed a high level of confidence, based on recent due diligence done by the finance committee, that they will be successful in securing a new loan.

Plans for the Next Charter Period

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

Amber Charter School's mission is to provide comprehensive learning experiences that will enable all students to become fully-educated, creative adults, prepared to play leadership roles in New York City and in our global society.

The school would continue providing instruction to students in kindergarten through 5th grade. Projected enrollment in each of the five years within the proposed charter period would be 425 students. The school would continue to offer a minimum of 180 days of instruction generally consistent with the school calendar of the New York City Department of Education.

Amber does not propose to make significant changes to its educational program, but rather would continue to enhance program components already in place. The school would continue using its current standards-based curriculum. Proposed key design elements for the next chart period would include: Spanish as a foreign language; 90 minutes of daily instruction in literacy and mathematics; 90 minutes of weekly instruction in science and social studies; enrichment instruction in art, music, physical education, and technology; a student council and a community service requirement; the “Amber Way” as a guide for maintaining a positive school culture; and parent and teacher representatives on the school’s board of trustees. In addition, the school plans on devoting additional time and resources to the use of assessment data to drive instructional delivery. Amber Charter School has presented a plan for implementing an educational program that would likely allow it to meet its Accountability Plan goals during the next charter period.

The school would maintain its current organizational structure that places the principal as the chief school officer. Members of the current school board of trustees expressed their interest in continuing their service to the school and would maintain the board’s existing committee structure to carry out its responsibilities. The board has the requisite skill sets and understanding of its roles and responsibilities to adequately govern Amber Charter School for the term of the next charter. Finally, the school intends on remaining in its current facility in east Harlem.

Amber has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan that is likely achievable. It projects an operating and cash flow surplus in each year. The school has assumed a three-percent increase in per pupil funding in each year of the plan, which contributes to a cash surplus each year. The school acknowledges that, given the state deficit problems, this percentage increase is not assured and has developed a contingency budget accordingly. The school’s plan provides support to the school’s programs, staffing and facility needs. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, laws and state funding. The school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts.

To the extent that Amber Charter School has achieved its key academic goals, continues to implement an educational program that supports achieving those goals, operates an effective and viable organization, and is fiscally sound, its plans to continue to implement the educational program as proposed during the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	January 21, 2000
Date Initial Charter Approved by Board of Regents	April 4, 2000
School Opening Date	September, 2000

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2000-2002	125 th St and Lenox Avenue, New York, NY	All	New York City Community School District 5
2002-present	220 East 106 th Street, New York, NY	All	New York City Community School District 5

Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current	Community Association of Progressive Dominicans	Non-Profit Community Based Organization	2000-present

Renewal

Type of Renewal	Date
Date Initial Full-Term Renewal with Conditions Approved by SUNY Trustees	March 1, 2005
Date Renewal Approved by the Regents	May 16, 2005

Current Mission Statement

Amber Charter School's mission is to provide comprehensive learning experiences that will enable all students to become fully-educated, creative adults, prepared to play leadership roles in New York City and in our global society.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interdisciplinary, thematic curricular units and implementation of the Success for All academic program; • multiple assessment instruments beginning in grade one; • foreign language for all students; • two hour daily literacy block for second through fifth grades that includes 45 minutes of smaller group instruction in guided reading; • daily mathematics block of 90 minutes through fifth grade; • enriched instruction in the arts including student performance events; • programs for struggling students, including Title I reading and math and special education services through inclusion models, remediation and enrichment;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong parental engagement;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • project-based and experiential learning opportunities;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fostering teacher leadership through participation in the board of trustees, curriculum, assessment, and hiring committees; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technologically-sound learning environment, school and classroom libraries.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ⁵	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Revised Chartered Grades	Days of Instruction
2000-01	120	120	120	K-1	K-1	N/A	181
2001-02	160	160	120	K-2	K-2	N/A	181
2002-03	200	200	180	K-3	K-3	N/A	181
2003-04	240	240	240	K-4	K-4	N/A	181
2004-05	280	280	291	K-5	K-5	N/A	181
2005-06	300	N/A	325	K-6	K-6	N/A	181
2006-07	350	N/A	364	K-6	K-6	N/A	181
2007-08	460	400	370	K-6	K-6	N/A	181
2008-09	460	425	356	K-6	K-5	K-5	181
2009-10	460	425	403	K-6	K-5	K-5	181

Student Demographics

	2006-07 ⁶		2007-08 ⁷		2008-09	
	School Enrollment	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment	School Enrollment	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment	School Enrollment ⁸	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment ⁹
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	N/A
Black or African American	71%	61%	65%	59%	57%	N/A
Hispanic	28%	36%	33%	37%	38%	N/A
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	N/A
White	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	N/A

⁵ Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

⁶ Source: 2006-07 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

⁷ Source: 2007-08 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

⁸ Source: 2008-09 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools. It does not include lunch status, this information was provided by the school.

⁹ Aggregated district data not yet available for 2008-09.

	2006-07 ⁶		2007-08 ⁷		2008-09	
	School Enrollment	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment	School Enrollment	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment	School Enrollment ⁸	NYC CSD 5 Enrollment ⁹
Multiracial	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	N/A
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities ¹⁰	N/A	N/A	6%	N/A	8%	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0%	11%	4%	11%	6%	N/A
Eligible for Free Lunch	74%	66%	71%	71%	75%	N/A
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	13%	5%	11%	7%	12%	N/A

Current Board of Trustees¹¹

Board Member Name	Position/Committees	Term
Luis Miranda	Chairman	1 year
Michael Stolper	Vice-Chairman	1 year
David Briggs	Secretary	1 year
Nicolas Rudenstine	Treasurer	1 year
Vasthi Acosta	Ex officio, board member	1 year
Christopher Brown	Trustee	1 year
Soledad Hiciano	Trustee	1 year
Vincente Leon	Trustee	1 year
Evelyn Linares	Trustee	1 year
Elisabeth Mason	Trustee	1 year
Francina Yaw	Trustee	1 year
Julio Rodriguez	Trustee	1 year

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2000-01 – 2004-05	Evelyn Marzan and Jon Moscow, Co-Directors
2005-06 – 2007-08	Rafael Ortiz, Head of School
2008-09 – 2009-10 (present)	Vasthi Acosta, Head of School/Principal

¹⁰ New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is school-reported from charter renewal applications. District data not available for NYC CSD 5

¹¹ Source: Application for Renewal.

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2000-01	First-Year Visit	Institute	June 6, 2001
2001-02	Second-Year Visit	Institute	May 16, 2002
2002-03	Third-Year Visit	External	March 18-19, 2003
2003-04	None	N/A	N/A
2004-05	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	November 3-5, 2004
2005-06	None	N/A	N/A
2006-07	Seventh-Year Visit	Institute	April 25, 2007
2007-08	Eighth-Year Visit	Institute	April 3, 2008
2008-09	None	N/A	N/A
2009-10	Subsequent Renewal Visit	Institute and External	October 1, 2009

ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Background

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

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

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

The following presentation indicates the outcome of each of the school's goals, as well as an analysis of the respective measures for each goal during the Accountability Period.¹² Italicized text indicates goals or measures as written in the school's Accountability Plan; bold numbers appearing in the tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was achieved in a given year. Aside from

¹² Because the renewal decision is made in the last year of a charter period, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the charter period. For a Subsequent Renewal, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter period through the next to last year of the current charter period.

required Accountability Plan measures, the following also presents the results of optional measures that the school may have included in its plan.

English Language Arts

Accountability Plan Goal: All students at Amber Charter School will become proficient readers and will make strong yearly progress towards mastery of English-language reading skills.

Outcome: Amber Charter School has met its English language arts goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: Each year, 75 percent of 3 rd through 6 th graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State ELA examination ¹³ .				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Grade	2005-06¹⁴ (Tested: 95)	2006-07 (Tested: 110)	2007-08 (Tested: 116)	2008-09 (Tested: 115)
3	79.3	69.0	59.1	88.2
4	50.0	80.0	51.9	81.8
5	50.0	61.5	47.8	95.0
6	33.3	48.0	54.5	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	56.8	65.5	54.3	87.0

With the exception of the 2007-08 school year, Amber Charter School’s performance on the state’s English language arts exam has improved during the Accountability Period. In 2005-06, 57 percent of 3rd through 6th grade students were proficient and the school was far from its 75 percent target. In 2006-07, the school’s performance improved with 66 percent of students proficient. In 2007-08, performance declined with 54 percent proficient. In 2008-09, when the school tested 3rd through 5th graders, the school exceeded its target for the first time and 87 percent of students were proficient.

Absolute Measure: Each year, the school’s aggregate Performance Index on the State ELA exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06¹⁵ (Tested: 125)	2006-07 (Tested: 119)	2007-08 (Tested: 125)	2008-09 (Tested: 116)
PI	144	166	156	187
AMO	122	122	133	144

Amber Charter School surpassed the English language arts Annual Measureable Objective (AMO) established by the state’s NCLB accountability system during each year of its Accountability Period.

¹³ Following the completion of the 2007-08 school year, Amber Charter School enrolled students in Kindergarten through 5th grade.
¹⁴ In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8. Prior to that, the exams in these subjects were administered only in grades 4 and 8.
¹⁵ In 2005-06 English language arts and mathematics testing began in grades 3-8, and the Performance Index was henceforth calculated based on the aggregate of all tested students.

The school's Performance Index has increased over 40 points from 2005-06 through 2008-09.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, Students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State ELA exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district (CSD 5).</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06 (Grades 3-6)	2006-07 (Grades 3-6)	2007-08 (Grades 3-6)	2008-09 (Grades 3-5)
School	56.8	65.5	54.3	87.0
District	37.4	39.5	48.0	57.1

Amber Charter School has consistently outperformed Community School District 5 on the state's English language arts exam during each year of the Accountability Period. In the most recent year, the school's proficiency rate exceeded that of the district by nearly 30 percentage points.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the school will exceed to a specified degree (as set by CSI) its expected level of performance on the State ELA exam, as determined by the performance of other schools that have a similar proportion of students eligible for free lunch among all charter and public schools in districts with charter schools.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 125)	2006-07 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 119)	2007-08 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 125)	2008-09 (Grades 3-5) (Tested: 116)
Predicted	50.7	50.7	58.3	66.2
Actual	52.0	66.4	55.6	87.1
Effect Size	0.07	1.06	-0.19	1.52

While Amber Charter School's Effect Size has varied during the current Accountability Period in comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, in the most recent year the school exceeded its target by a wide margin and performed better than expected to a large degree. In 2005-06, the school performed about the same as expected on the state English language arts exam and then improved its performance in the following year, exceeding its targeted level of performance by a wide margin. In 2007-08, the school's relative performance declined and the school performed about the same as expected. In the most recent year, the school's comparative performance improved and the school exceeded its target by a wide margin.

Growth Measure: Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State ELA exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State ELA exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Percent Level 3 & 4	2005-06	2006-07¹⁶ (Grades 4-6) (N=79)	2007-08 (Grades 4-6) (N=68)	2008-09 (Grades 4-5) (N=66)
Baseline	-	58.2	76.5	62.1
Target	-	66.6	76.6	68.6
Actual	-	64.6	51.5	84.8
Cohorts Made Target	-	(1 of 3)	(0 of 3)	(2 of 2)

With respect to cohort growth, Amber Charter School's performance has fluctuated. In 2006-07, when two years of state data first became available permitting growth analyses, one of the school's three 4th through 6th grade cohorts achieved its target and overall performance improved somewhat. In 2007-08, none of the school's cohorts achieved their growth targets and overall performance declined substantially. In 2008-09, both of the school's cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance improved significantly.

Mathematics

Accountability Plan Goal: All students at Amber Charter School will become proficient in math and will make strong yearly progress towards mastery of mathematical skills.

Outcome: Amber Charter School has met its mathematics goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: Each year, 75 percent of 3 rd through 6 th graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Mathematics examination.				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Grade	2005-06¹⁷ (Tested: 98)	2006-07 (Tested: 107)	2007-08 (Tested: 116)	2008-09 (Tested: 115)
3	61.3	92.9	84.1	98.0
4	57.7	60.7	59.3	95.5
5	35.7	44.4	56.5	100.0
6	7.7	58.3	59.1	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	45.9	64.5	68.1	97.4

¹⁶ New York State began administering English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8 in 2005-06, thus year-to-year growth could not be evaluated until 2006-07 when two years' of results were first available.

¹⁷ In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8. Prior to that, the exams in these subjects were administered only in grades 4 and 8.

Amber Charter School has significantly improved its performance on the state’s mathematics exam during the Accountability Period. In 2005-06, 46 percent of students scored proficient or better, falling well short of its 75 percent target. In 2006-07, performance improved to 65 percent of students scoring proficient; in 2007-08, performance improved slightly; in 2008-09, 97 percent of students scored proficient and the school exceeded its target by a wide margin.

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year, the school’s aggregate Performance Index on the State math exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06¹⁸ (Tested: 124)	2006-07 (Tested: 117)	2007-08 (Tested: 125)	2008-09 (Tested: 116)
PI	131	161	162	197
AMO	86	86	102	119

Amber Charter School has surpassed the mathematics Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) established by the state’s NCLB accountability system by a wide margin during each year of its Accountability Period. The school’s Performance Index has improved over 60 points from 2005-06.

Comparative Measure: <i>Students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Math exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district CSD 5.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06 (Grades 3-6)	2006-07 (Grades 3-6)	2007-08 (Grades 3-6)	2008-09 (Grades 3-6)
School	45.9	64.5	68.1	97.4
District	49.5	60.1	67.3	75.3

With the exception of the 2005-06 school year, Amber Charter School has outperformed Community School 5 during the Accountability Period. In the most recent year, the school’s relative performance improved dramatically and the school outperformed its local district by over 20 percentage points.

Comparative Measure: <i>The school will exceed to a specified degree (as set by CSI) its expected level of performance on the State Math exam, as determined by the performance of other schools that have a similar proportion of students eligible for free lunch among all charter and public schools in districts with charter schools.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Index	2005-06 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 124)	2006-07 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 117)	2007-08 (Grades 3-6) (Tested: 125)	2008-09 (Grades 3-5) (Tested: 116)
Predicted	58.7	67.6	77.6	84.7
Actual	48.4	64.7	66.4	97.4
Effect Size	-0.45	-0.12	-0.75	1.12

In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Amber Charter School’s relative performance has fluctuated, remaining below its target until the most recent year. From 2005-06

¹⁸ In 2005-06 English language arts and mathematics testing began in grades 3-8, and the Performance Index was henceforth calculated based on the aggregate of all tested students.

through 2007-08, the school performed lower than expected and fell short of its Effect Size target. In the most recent year, the school's comparative performance improved significantly and the school exceeded its Effect Size target for the first time, performing better than expected to a large degree.

Growth Measure: <i>Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State Math exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State Math exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Percent Level 3 & 4	School Year			
	2005-06	2006-07¹⁹ (Grades) (N=78)	2007-08 (Grades) (N=71)	2008-09 (Grades) (N=66)
Baseline	-	55.1	66.2	75.8
Target	-	65.1	70.6	75.9
Actual	-	56.4	56.3	97.0
Cohorts Made Target	-	(1 of 3)	(0 of 3)	(2 of 2)

With respect to cohort growth, Amber Charter School has recently improved its performance on the state mathematics exam. While in previous years, few cohorts achieved their growth targets and overall performance remained level or declined, in the most recent school year, both of the school's cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance improved markedly.

Science

Accountability Plan Goal: All students at Amber Charter School will become proficient in science and will make strong yearly progress toward mastery of scientific skills.

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

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>In each year, 75 percent of fourth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2005-06 (Tested: 54)	2006-07 (Tested: 27)	2007-08 (Tested: 27)	2008-09 (Tested: 45)
4	75.9	85.2	70.4	88.9
8	-	-	-	-

With the exception of the 2007-08 school year, Amber Charter School has exceeded its absolute target on the state's 4th grade science exam during each year of the Accountability Period. In the most recent year, 90 percent of students were proficient and the school exceeded its target by a wide margin.

¹⁹ New York State began administering English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8 in 2005-06, thus year-to-year growth could not be evaluated until 2006-07 when two years' of results were first available.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Science exam will be greater than that of the local school district CSD#5.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06 (Grade 4)	2006-07 (Grade 4)	2007-08 (Grade 4)	2008-09 (Grade 4)
School	75.9	85.2	70.4	88.9
District	56.0	52.0	55.0	NA

Amber Charter School outperformed Community School District #5 by a wide margin on the state’s 4th grade science exam from 2005-06 through 2007-08. While district comparison data for the 2008-09 school year are yet unavailable, Amber Charter School’s 89 percent proficiency rate exceeds the district’s performance in each of the three previous years. Assuming district performance remained at a similar level on the 2008-09 exam, the school will have again met its target.

Social Studies

Accountability Plan Goal: All students at Amber Charter School will become proficient in social studies and will make strong yearly progress toward mastery of social studies skills.

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

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>In each year, 75 percent of fifth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Grade	2005-06 (Tested: 41)	2006-07 (Tested: 31)	2007-08 (Tested: 24)	2008-09 (Tested: 20)
5	80.5	71.0	70.4	90.0
8	-	-	-	-

Amber Charter School has essentially met its Accountability Plan target on the state’s 5th grade social studies exam during each year of the Accountability Period. In the most recent year, 90 percent of students were proficient and the school exceeded its target by a wide margin.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Social Studies exam will be greater than that of the local school district CSD#5.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
	School Year			
Comparison	2005-06 (Grade 5)	2006-07 (Grade 5)	2007-08 (Grade 5)	2008-09 (Grade 5)
School	80.5	71.0	70.4	90.0
District	43.0	38.0	25.0	NA

Amber Charter School outperformed Community School District #5 by a wide margin on the state’s 5th grade social studies exam from 2005-06 through 2007-08. While district comparison data for the

2008-09 school year are yet unavailable, Amber Charter School’s 90 percent proficiency rate exceeds the district’s performance in each of the three previous years. Assuming district performance remained at a similar level on the 2008-09 exam, the school will have again met its target.

NCLB

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

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

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

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

Analysis of Additional Evidence

Amber Charter School received a letter grade of "A" on its 2008-09 New York City Department of Education (DOE) Progress Report. According to the DOE, overall Progress Report scores are based on school performance in three categories: School Environment, Student Performance and Student Progress, with the greatest emphasis placed on Student Progress. District schools or charter schools authorized by the Department of Education that receive As and Bs are eligible for rewards while schools that get Ds and Fs, or Cs over three years in a row, face possible consequences.

Consistent with the data presented for the Accountability Plan measures in English language arts and mathematics above, Amber received the highest possible score for both Student Performance and Student Growth on its most recent DOE Progress Report. These high marks reflect the school’s near-perfect proficiency rate on the state mathematics exam, its strong performance on the state English language arts exam and the extraordinary year-to-year growth in student proficiency rates from 2007-08 to 2008-09 on both exams.