Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Community Partnership Charter School

School Evaluation Report
2008-2009

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INTRODUCTION

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

- **Facilitate Improvement.** By providing substantive information about the school's academic, fiscal and organizational strengths and weaknesses to the school's board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school identify areas for improvement.

- **Disseminate Information.** The Institute disseminates information about the school's performance not only to its board of trustees, administration and faculty, but to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located.

- **Document Performance.** The Institute collects information to build a database of a school's performance over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute can more clearly ascertain trends, determine areas of strength and weakness, and assess the school's likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute is in a better position to make recommendations regarding the renewal of each school's charter, and the State University Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school's charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

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

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Based on the analysis of evidence gathered during an evaluation visit to the Community Partnership Charter School on April 21, 2009, the school appears to be making adequate progress towards achieving its mission. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators, which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

Academic Success

Community Partnership Charter School regularly administers a variety of useful diagnostic, formative and summative assessments, with a heavy emphasis placed on those that measure literacy in the early grades. The school has procedures in place to systematically collect and analyze results from these assessments and, at the school level, weekly reports detailing teacher, grade-level and various student subgroup performance are generated and shared with the school's leadership team. Teachers and administrators regularly use these results to improve student performance and to evaluate and change the academic program.

The school has a defined curricular framework that is aligned to state standards, and teachers plan purposeful lessons with predominantly clear learning objectives. A variety of school-created curricular documents guide teachers' instructional planning, including year-long pacing calendars, curriculum crosswalks, scope and sequences aligned to New York State performance standards and subject specific overviews. With few exceptions, students were engaged by rigorous instruction that often required higher order thinking skills, and students were often pushed to think critically about the material presented in lessons. Community Partnership teachers use multiple strategies to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students; the presence of two adults in every classroom facilitates this process.

School leaders at Community Partnership have set high expectations for student and teacher performance. The school's instructional leadership team, including two on-site staff developers, conducts regular observations and provides teachers with ongoing feedback and systematic support, including individualized coaching, modeling and lesson planning support. The school provides an abundance of resources for at-risk students, including the use of Collaborative Team Teaching methods; these supports are well integrated with the school's overall instructional approach. Community Partnership is safe and orderly and has created a culture where learning is valued. Finally, the school has a cohesive and sustained professional development program that adequately addresses the needs of teachers and students and is differentiated to match teachers' level of expertise and instructional responsibilities.

Organizational Capacity

Day to day operations of the school are competently managed. Roles and responsibilities of the school's leadership and staff members are clearly defined. The school has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel. The school's board of trustees is clearly focused on student achievement and possesses a wide variety of skill sets with which they competently govern the school.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application to establish Community Partnership Charter School ("CPCS") on January 21, 2000, and the Board of Regents voted to approve the charter in April of that same year. The school opened in the fall of 2000 serving an initial enrollment of 100 students in Kindergarten and first grade.

At that time, the school was located in the carriage house of a refurbished state armory at 171 Clermont in the Clinton Hill / Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. In September 2003, the school outgrew that space and split between two locations, with grades 2 and 3 housed in PS 9, located at 80 Underhill Avenue, and Kindergarten, and grades 1 and 4 remaining at 171 Clermont. In August 2004, the entire school moved to its current location where it shares space with PS 270 at 241 Emerson Place in Brooklyn. The school added one additional grade in each of the 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05 school years. CPCS currently serves 289 students in Kindergarten through fifth grades.

Community Partnership Charter School is one of two charter schools supported by the Beginning with Children Foundation (the second school, also located in Brooklyn, is the Beginning with Children Charter School, authorized by the New York City Schools' Chancellor). CPCS maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with the Foundation for services in the following areas: research and assessment; business support services, accountability/compliance; development; technology; public relations/media; and outreach/advocacy. The Beginning with Children Foundation was established in 1989 by Joe and Carol Reich to: "…effect positive change in the public school system through the staunch belief that 'all children can learn.'"

On March 1, 2005, the State University Trustees granted CPCS a short-term renewal for a period of two years, through and including July 31, 2007, with authority limited to providing instruction in grades K-5 with a maximum enrollment of 500 students. On March 20, 2007, the State University Trustees granted CPCS a full-term renewal of five years.

As of the date of the current school inspection, the Board of Trustees of CPCS consisted of the following individuals:

- Mr. Martin J. Ragde, Board Chair;
- Mr. John Burke, Vice Chair;
- Ms. Terri L. Canady;
- Herzen Clerge;
- Mr. John DiPaolo;
- Ms. Ghana-Imani Hylton;
- Ms. Carol Matthews;
- Mr. David Stutt;
- Pam Walker, Esq.; and
- Ms. Melanie Bryon, *ex officio*

The school's mission statement is as follows:

> *At the Community Partnership Charter School, families, educators and community members join together to create a learning environment that fosters high academic achievement which exceeds the New York State performance standards. An enriched curriculum and dynamic*

partnerships between the school, families, and community enable all students to become life long learners and active citizens who value kindness and respect.

According to its charters, CPCS is committed to developing the "whole child," focusing not only on mastery of core academic subjects, but also supporting the physical, psychological and emotional health of a predominantly at-risk population. Technology is fully integrated into the school's curriculum, which also offers exposure to the arts, health, fitness, music and other enrichment.

Key design elements include:

- culturally/politically relevant instruction centered on curricular materials relevant to students' lives;
- integrated instruction wherein students experience a seamless day utilizing reading, writing and math in the pursuit of scientific and social inquiry;
- differentiated instruction wherein all students work on the same concept, but at individual instructional levels;
- process vs. product, i.e., instructional activities geared toward helping students internalize processes of writing, social and scientific inquiry, mathematical thinking, and reading for meaning;
- partner and small group work;
- heterogeneous grouping wherein students gain from each other's strengths and learn to help each other with weaknesses;
- student centered vs. teacher centered; and
- a focus on the senior experience – as students approach their "senior" year at CPCS, they begin to earn special privileges and to take on new responsibilities.

In the 2007-08 school year, CPCS refined its literacy program, specifically focusing on improving student decoding, fluency and reading comprehension skills by: supporting longer sessions of small group instruction and piloting a departmentalized structure in grade 5 that integrated social studies into ELA. After an extensive analysis of math needs, CPCS also introduced a new mathematics program, *Investigations in Number, Data and Space* (*2d ed.* 2008), by Pearson Learning.

School Year (2008-09)

174.5 instructional days

School Day (2008-09)

8:20 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Enrollment

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment[1]	Original Chartered Grades	Complying
2000-01	100	100	K-1	Yes
2001-02	150	150	K-2	Yes
2002-03	200	200	K-3	Yes
2003-04	250	250	K-4	Yes
2004-05	300	300	K-5	Yes
2005-06	300	300	K-5	Yes
2006-07	300	288	K-5	Yes
2007-08	300	290	K-5	Yes
2008-09	300	289	K-5	Yes

Demographic Data[2]

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #13 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #13 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #13 Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	1	1	1	1	1
Black or African American	91	65	91	64	89	63
Hispanic	8	15	8	15	10	15
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0	13	0	14	0	15
White	1	7	0	6	0	7
Multiracial[3]	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities	10.5	N/A	10.1	10.9	N/A	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0.0	3.8	0.0	3.9	0	4.0
Free/Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	55	60	59	61	54	60
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	24	9	15	10	17	10

[1] Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the New York State Education Department School Report Card and Database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.
[2] Source: 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 School Report Cards (New York State Education Department). Note that the State Education Department does not report special education data.
[3] Multiracial enrollment data were not collected statewide in the 2005-06 school year.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Background

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

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

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

Summary of Previous Evaluation Visits

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a subsequent renewal inspection visit to Community Partnership Charter School in the fall of 2007. The evaluation team observed classrooms, interviewed administrators, board members and teachers, and reviewed student work and other documents. A report was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit, which are briefly summarized below.

At the time of the Institute's renewal visit to Community Partnership, the team found that the school recognized the value of assessment and appeared to have a broad sense of the ways in which assessment should influence instruction. Teachers and school leaders had a large amount of testing data from the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) as well as baseline assessments. In addition, school leaders had developed and piloted a system of interim assessments and were in the process of refining them with teacher input. While teachers appeared to understand the mechanics of the assessment system and indicated that they understood the potential value of using assessment data to drive instruction, they were not yet able to do so effectively.

With regard to the school's curriculum, a series of guiding documents, including pacing calendars, curriculum crosswalks, scope and sequences aligned to New York State performance standards, subject specific overviews and tools to support teachers in using the curricular materials, had been

developed. These tools were readily accessible to teachers, and there was evidence that teachers used these materials in lesson planning.

At the time of the visit, the school's leader delineated the school's goals and expectations in the *Culture of Excellence* document, which set a common language and approach for various aspects of school function to improve student achievement. The school invested significant resources in an in-house professional development program, which included an individualized goal setting process, weekly grade level meetings and whole school staff development supported by two full-time staff developers.

While teachers appeared to be knowledgeable about the school's curriculum, the effect of this professional development system on teachers' instructional skills was unclear after the one-day renewal visit. Classroom observations revealed that the teaching staff, many of whom had little experience, had substantial needs in the areas of classroom management and pedagogy.

The Institute found evidence that Community Partnership was an effective and viable organization in terms of its corporate governance and in meeting legal requirements. While the Institute found that the potential conflict of interest inherent in the board's relationship with the Beginning with Children Foundation had not interfered with the school's operation, it did note that transparency around this relationship could be improved. The school's board of trustees understood that the core work of the school was student achievement and had committed to creating a "sense of urgency" since the initial renewal two years before.

Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)

Community Partnership Charter School regularly administers a variety of useful diagnostic, formative and summative assessments, with a heavy emphasis placed on those that measure literacy in the early grades. In kindergarten through 2nd grade, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment was administered to all students by the school's assessment coordinator at the beginning of the year and frequently thereafter for students found to be performing below grade level. In upper grades, the DIBELS assessment is used to track at-risk students' progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. In addition to the DIBELS assessment three times a year, classroom teachers administer running records' assessments to assess students' reading fluency and comprehension.

Teachers reported, and observers noted, the regular use of a variety of in-class formative assessments and informal checks for understanding, including weekly quizzes, end of unit tests, one-on-one student conferencing, and exit tickets. Teacher-created rubrics were observed to be in use for grading longer-term student projects. The school has continued the process of developing a series of interim assessments to periodically assess student progress and track mastery of English language arts and mathematics learning objectives. Dependent upon the subject and grade level, these interim assessments were either internally developed using questions drawn from multiple choice question databases or were based on released state exams.

In place of the Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) and Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) assessments administered in previous years, the school administered the Terra Nova English language arts and math assessments for the first time this fall. Students were assessed again in the spring to measure progress. In writing,

"quick write" formal writing prompts are administered twice a year to assess students' abilities, and teachers reported using grade-level specific rubrics based on the Teachers College K-8 Continuum.

The school has procedures in place to systematically collect and analyze assessment results and use them to improve student performance. While previous reports noted teachers' limited ability to use assessment data to drive instruction, observers found ample evidence of teachers' competence in using data for this purpose during the visit. The school's math staff developer designed a "Unit Benchmarks and Performance Indicators of New York Learning Standards" tool to track student mastery of skill areas. The tool provides teachers with a structured method for analyzing student and class performance by color-coding student performance levels within each skill area. In consultation with the math staff developer, these charts are used to inform grouping and identify areas in need of re-teaching. In addition to tracking mastery of math unit objectives, kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers administer and track results of bi-weekly "fact assessments," which measure students' computation skills. In comparison to previous years when delays in receiving interim assessment results limited their usefulness, the scoring and analysis of interim assessments has been streamlined with the support of the Beginning with Children Foundation (BWCF) staff, and teachers receive student level results and item analysis summaries soon after each test's administration. Staff members reported the regular use of data to inform instructional planning and delivery, and teachers reported using these results to guide instructional planning, identify topics in need of re-teaching and fine tune the curriculum during meetings with the school's staff developers. For example, 4th grade English language arts teachers noticed that their students were having difficulty with fluency; in response to this, teachers created "fluency folders" to facilitate independent student practice.

At Community Partnership, the use of data to inform decision making is not limited to informing classroom practice; school leaders reported the careful analysis of student performance data to inform decisions regarding the overall academic program and to drive school-wide improvement. At the school level, the assessment coordinator creates weekly reports summarizing student performance disaggregated by teacher, grade-level and various subgroups and shares these reports with the school's leadership team. These reports are used to target grade-level and teacher specific action plans for improvement. For example, based on interim assessment results in kindergarten, school leaders recognized student deficits in decoding skills. After researching available programs, the school leaders decided to implement the Reading Mastery program so as to provide more structured instruction in decoding for young readers. Additionally, through analysis of student subgroup data, school leaders identified improving the effectiveness of interventions provided to at-risk students as a priority and have dedicated significant resources to this area.

Community Partnership keeps parents and community members well apprised of individual student and overall school performance results. Progress reports and report cards are sent home to parents twice a year. "Promotion in doubt" letters are sent home to students who are in danger of being retained. These letters provide a detailed description of student deficiencies, spell out criteria necessary for students to be promoted to the next grade, and provide parents with additional resources and strategies to support their children. In addition to the aforementioned formal communication methods, teachers reported regular informal communication with parents—in person before and after school, as well as over the phone and by email—regarding individual student performance. School-wide performance data are shared with the community at open school nights, awards ceremonies, Family Academy events and through monthly meetings of the Parent Teacher Community Cooperative (PTCC).

Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)

The school has a defined curricular framework that is aligned to state standards, and teachers are sufficiently supported in what to teach and when to teach it. A variety of school-created curricular documents guide teachers' instructional planning, including year-long pacing calendars, curriculum crosswalks, scope and sequences aligned to New York State performance standards and subject specific overviews. Individual lessons and units are drawn from a variety of commercial curricular programs. While many of the lessons are scripted, teachers are empowered to modify and supplement them as needed.

Lesson plans are submitted for review and archiving on a weekly basis. During weekly grade level meetings, the school's English language arts and mathematics staff developers provide feedback on these plans and provide additional support and guidance to teachers around implementation. Teachers reported that this support was useful and that they felt well resourced in the planning process.

In the lower grades, *SRA Reading Mastery* is used to teach decoding skills and build fluency. Lessons from *Text Talk* and the *Urban Education Exchange* are used to supplement *Reading Mastery* and to build students' vocabulary and comprehension skills. In the upper grades, as most students have placed out of the *Reading Mastery* program, the *Lucy Calkins Teachers College Writing Project* program serves as the base of the school's writers workshop program, and a guided reading program based on *Fountas and Pinnell* leveled texts is used as well.

In mathematics, *Investigations in Number, Data, and Space* by Pearson Learning was adopted to replace the McGraw Hill math program used previously. A curriculum adoption committee led by the school's math staff developer chose the Pearson program because it pushes a "21st century view of math" and provides teachers with student work samples and video taped sample lessons. Committee members also appreciated the supports and extensions provided within lessons to remediate students who struggle and to push more advanced students. The Pearson lessons are supplemented with lessons from *Everyday Mathematics* along with additional teacher designed practice activities. The *Mathematics Navigator* program provides additional focused support for struggling students.

The *Full Option Science System* (FOSS) provides teachers with scripted lessons that allow for hands-on inquiry and investigation. Social Studies lessons are prepared by a specialist and given to teachers to implement in class.

The school has a process for the continual refinement of the curriculum. According to the principal, Community Partnership's curriculum is "a work in progress" as the school aims to move away from its reliance upon scripted commercial curricula towards more of a "workshop model" that involves teachers in the development and planning of their lessons and ensures alignment with standards. As a secondary goal of the effort is to develop highly professional teachers who feel a sense of ownership over the curriculum, the principal has made a deliberate effort to involve teachers in the ongoing curricular development work.

Using existing scope and sequence documents, in the summer teachers began the process of creating detailed curricular maps aligned to state standards to guide day-to-day instruction. The school had dedicated time during the school year for teachers to work on these maps within grade-level teams and with the support of the school's staff developers. Teachers appreciate their role in the process and the structure the maps provide. Teachers reported that the maps they have created are "working documents" and "tools for us to use." Teachers have a sense of purpose about their work; one

teacher said that "the curriculum maps project provides [teachers with] a concrete framework to develop lessons."

According to the school leader, further meeting time will be dedicated to the continued development of these maps and, although staff developers have already begun to guide teachers in the alignment process, the next step will be to strengthen the vertical alignment of the maps from grade to grade within each subject area.

Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)

Teachers plan purposeful lessons with predominantly clear learning objectives and, with few exceptions, students are engaged by rigorous instruction that often requires higher order thinking skills. In observed classes, students were generally on task and participated in structured learning activities. Observed lessons were drawn mainly from scripted commercial curricula and provided learning activities that related directly to the stated learning objectives.

Transitions between activities were smooth and pacing was effective. Teachers employed effective classroom management techniques, and activities were structured so as to minimize distraction while encouraging participation. Teachers made deliberate attempts to maximize the use of learning time and time on task. In one class, for example, table monitors were assigned to collect and distribute materials quickly and purposefully.

In the vast majority of observed classes, students were pushed to think critically about the material presented in lessons and to apply higher order thinking skills when providing responses to teachers' questions. In addition, students were often asked to provide multiple ways of solving problems, to explain their process as they completed the assigned tasks, and to make and justify predictions. However, while upper grade math and science classes provide engaging lessons with thought provoking activities, inspectors noted that the full potential for rigorous instruction in these subjects may not be realized because teachers do not consistently use effective questioning techniques to monitor student understanding and focus lesson objectives. In an upper grade math lesson, for example, students worked in small groups. During the activity, the teacher circulated through the class but did not check for student understanding. Halfway through the class period, the teacher had students put examples of their work on the board and each one was incorrect. During the subsequent whole group review session, while the teacher continually reviewed the steps in adding fractions, she did not check in with students for understanding but rather responded to their specific questions seeking clarification.

Community Partnership teachers used multiple strategies to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students. Inspectors noted the extensive use of grouping, especially in reading lessons. While one group of students worked independently, co-teachers met with small groups of other students to provide targeted instruction. According to teachers, students are grouped based on ability levels across grades, not just classes, and changes to these groupings are made throughout the year as students' needs change. Teachers indicated that they differentiate pacing, modify activities and worksheets and use leveled texts across the different groups to meet the diverse needs of students. Modifications targeted towards higher performing students were observed to be in use at the school as well. For guided reading, a group of high performing first grade students are taught by the school's assessment coordinator, who helps them to apply skills taught by the classroom teacher to higher level texts.

Observed math and science lessons were taught to heterogeneous groups, but the presence of co-teachers allowed for more individualized attention for students who had difficulty with the material. In addition, the *Mathematics Navigator* math program was used to support students who need additional practice.

Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)

The school has a strong instructional leadership team that has set high expectations for student and teacher performance. The leadership team's work is clearly focused on raising student achievement and "developing the whole child" for all students at Community Partnership. Teachers reported that school leaders have established an environment in which everyone believes that "these are all of our kids" and all children can and will achieve at high levels. Teachers also reported that school leaders expect them to openly and honestly reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and seek to improve their practice through collaboration. Teachers appreciated the "open door" policy of the school, which encourages them to observe each other in order to learn new techniques and provides support for teachers who struggle.

The school's instructional leadership team conducts regular observations and provides teachers with ongoing feedback and systematic support. The school has in place a model that provides each teacher with individualized coaching. The school's staff developers serve as coaches; teachers reported weekly meetings with them and noted support in planning lessons, differentiating instruction and using assessment data. Staff developers observe, model and provide suggestions to teachers. The feedback provided is both oral and written, with much of it conveyed via informal email and notes. Individualized goals set by teachers at the beginning of the year drive much of the support that their coaches provide; however, the school's leadership team provides additional targeted intervention when data or observation indicates that teachers have additional needs or areas for improvement.

Teachers reported that other adults are frequently in their classrooms as peer observation is encouraged, and that feedback is expected and comfortable. The dean of students provides select teachers with feedback around classroom culture, community building and discipline. Although more experienced teachers reported less frequent observation by staff developers, on the whole, teachers were satisfied with the level of observation and feedback they received and felt very supported.

The school employs a differentiated teacher evaluation system whereby novice teachers are observed more frequently than veteran teachers. Formal evaluations are conducted by the principal of the school twice a year for more experienced teachers and three times a year for more novice staff members. These evaluations consist of a full period of classroom observation and a post-observation one-on-one debriefing. During this meeting, the principal generates a letter documenting the conversation and identifies items for follow-up in subsequent observations. A common rubric is used to evaluate teachers' overall performance. Completed rubrics, along with observation notes and meeting notes, were filed and available for review at the time of the visit. Visit team members' inspection of the files indicated that they were complete and up to date and provided specific feedback to teachers on areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

Instructional leaders adequately monitor and evaluate the academic program, including the efficacy of intervention services provided. Based on analysis of student achievement data, the school leadership identified improving the efficacy of intervention programs and supports provided for at-risk students as a priority. In response, school leaders implemented a Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) model to support struggling students and contracted with an external consultant to provide

CTT teachers with additional support and training in best practices. Additionally, the school leadership team has made numerous changes to the academic program, including the adoption of new curricular programs (e.g. Reading Mastery, Investigations) and assessments (e.g. Terra Nova, interim assessments) and has worked to tailor the professional development program to meet individual teachers' needs.

At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)

The school's instructional approach is designed to meet the needs of at-risk students. Through the co-teaching and Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) models, targeted instruction, remediation, intervention and differentiated learning opportunities for at-risk students are woven throughout the regular education classroom.

The school provides an abundance of resources for at-risk students. Classrooms are staffed by two teachers who share instructional responsibilities. Teachers reported that the co-teaching model allowed them to reduce group size and provide more attention to those students needing additional support. For example, in a 4th grade classroom, students reading at a lower level received a double period of guided reading while the higher performing students had one session of guided reading and one session of independent work.

Last year, the school piloted the CTT model in select grades and has expanded the program for the current year. The model places all students from a single grade-level who have special education needs into a single class where instruction is provided by two certified teachers, one of whom holds special education credentials. The school has hired an external consultant who is on site weekly supporting CTT teachers through modeling, observing, providing feedback and planning lessons with them.

In addition to the in-class supports provided by the CTT model, the school's Special Education Teacher Support Service (SETTS) coordinator provides push-in and pull-out service to at-risk students. Notably, these supports were not provided exclusively to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), but were also provided to students deemed in need of additional support. Teachers reported close coordination between instruction provided by the SETSS teacher and classroom instruction. Additional tutoring sessions are made available by teachers before and after school as needed, and the school runs a Saturday Academy that provides additional learning time as well as enrichment activities.

The school's Provider Team (dean of students, social worker, speech consultant, SETTS coordinator and other relevant individuals) reported meeting weekly to discuss students of concern and to develop mini-action plans to meet students' needs. These meetings often included students' parents or guardians, and team members reported that they were useful and focused on student learning outcomes.

Observers also noted several examples of modifications that were provided to students with different needs during whole group instruction. In one class, the teacher taped notes into selected students' notebooks rather having them copy the notes on their own; in another class, the teacher led a question and answer session while the co-teacher floated between select students' desks to check for understanding.

The school has clear procedures for identifying students with special needs. The school's Child Study Team (CST), consisting of the school's social worker, the dean of students, staff developers and select service providers, meets monthly to discuss students identified by teachers and

administrators as potentially in need of additional academic interventions or supports. Teachers and administrators are responsible for nominating students to be considered by the CST, and referrals to the CST were reported to be based on anecdotal as well as performance assessment evidence, e.g., DIBELS and running records.

Following identification, staff developers and the school's SETTS coordinator observe selected students' in-class performance and collect relevant assessment data for presentation at the monthly CST meeting. During the meeting, the team engages in a structured discussion and develops action plans which specify interventions and individualized performance targets. One month later, the CST reevaluates student performance and those who have not demonstrated progress are referred to the local CSE for evaluation. Classroom teachers were aware of the procedure for identifying students with special needs and when asked, could clearly articulate the steps followed and the role they played in the process. Teachers felt that there was regular communication between the CST and classroom teachers throughout the process and that appropriate follow-up was provided when necessary. In addition, the school uses the LAB-R and NYSESLAT assessments to identify and monitor the progress of English language learners.

Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)

A safe and orderly environment has been established throughout Community Partnership Charter School. Students appeared to have internalized the school's behavioral expectations, and misbehavior was virtually non-existent. Transitions between classrooms were calm and orderly, and a peaceful tenor pervaded observed classrooms. Teachers reported that "routines are set" and that "students know what to do every time." Students showed respect for their teachers and each other, often volunteering to help each other without being asked.

Community Partnership appears to have made progress in addressing issues raised in the Institute's 2007 Renewal Report regarding classroom management and student behavior. In nearly every classroom, teachers employed a variety of effective classroom management strategies to establish a culture where learning is valued and low level misbehavior is not tolerated. The school's disciplinary approach was based on methods described in Fred Jones' book *Tools for Teaching*, which encourages teachers to actively prevent misbehavior before it happens and to address misbehavior in a non-aggressive way when it does occur. The school's dean of students provides coaching around the use of nonverbal responses to curtail low-level misbehavior and avoid conflict escalation. Teachers were observed to use a variety of procedures to maintain students' focus on learning, including countdowns, silent signals, proximity cues, positive reinforcement of desired behaviors and the delivery of explicit instructions and clear expectations before undertaking new activities. During independent work, students were observed to work quietly and asked each other for assistance without disrupting other students working nearby. Transitions between centers were quick and efficient, and students were regularly praised for good behaviors. Teachers have begun to award "preferred activity time" to groups and individuals who meet behavioral expectations. Through the use of "power talk" and the "community share box," students are encouraged to take ownership of conflict resolution and to bring issues to the teachers' attention without disrupting learning activities.

The school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied. A series of consequence hierarchies have been developed for each grade level that are in line with the school's written discipline policy. Teachers are encouraged to try a variety of interventions to correct offending students' misbehavior before referring them to an administrator. Teachers reported that they rarely referred students to the office for misbehavior, preferring to resolve conflicts within their classrooms or with fellow grade level teachers. Teachers understood that referrals were to be used sparingly and

only as a last resort. The dean of students echoed this sentiment and noted that "discipline isn't something you pass off...it's something you've got to develop and take ownership of."

Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)

Community Partnership has a cohesive and sustained professional development program that adequately addresses the needs of teachers and students. The school uses a three tiered professional development system comprised of monthly whole-day professional development sessions, weekly grade level meetings, and regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings with the principal and the school's staff developers. Staff developers provide significant targeted observation and feedback along with coaching and modeling, and teachers have the opportunity to attend outside workshops, seminars and national conferences.

Prior to the start of the school year, new and returning teachers attended a two-week summer professional development program during which the school's leadership team communicated expectations for the coming year and reviewed updated school procedures and changes to curricular programs. New teachers reported to school before returning teachers in order to attend an additional orientation session where general school operations were reviewed. The rest of the summer workshops centered on developing classroom culture and creating a community of learners. Teachers were also given time to meet in subject and grade-level teams to plan for the coming year.

During the school year, in-house professional development sessions led by school staff members have covered a range of topics, including unit planning using backwards design, assessment data and its use in instructional planning, technology in the classroom, the use of writing rubrics, implementing culturally relevant instruction, and Fred Jones behavior management strategies.

Professional development is differentiated to match teachers' levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities, and staff developers tailor instructional support to meet the needs and individualized goals of teachers. During weekly meetings, teachers and staff developers cooperatively set priorities around targeted areas for improvement and professional growth. Based on these priorities and goals, staff developers provide teachers with coaching, modeling and targeted feedback. Teachers appreciated the quantity and quality of the feedback from the staff developers. The majority of in-house professional development workshops, however, are delivered to the staff as a whole group. Teachers were for the most part satisfied with these sessions, but some teachers reported a desire for a more differentiated approach, specifically with regards to training for lead teachers and assistant teachers.

As a complement to in-house workshops, teachers are provided with opportunities to attend workshops and conferences relevant to the subjects they teach as well as in areas targeted for individual professional growth. This year, for example, the math staff developer and two math teachers planned to attend the National Conference of Teachers of Mathematics, and a group of teachers attended a training run by *Schools Attuned* on differentiating instruction based on student learning style.

Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)

Community Partnership has remained faithful to its mission. All stakeholders at the school, including teachers, school leaders and board members, were familiar with and expressed commitment to the school's mission of high academic achievement for all students and developing life-long learners who value kindness and respect. Further, the school has fully implemented the key design elements included in its charter.

The school has also met the non-academic goals outlined in its Accountability Plan. As reported in its 2007-2008 Accountability Plan Progress Report, Community Partnership has met its goals regarding parent satisfaction, student attrition and attendance. On the year-end survey administered to families, over 90 percent of parents rated the school as satisfactory. Average daily student attendance at the school was 94 percent during the 2007-2008 school year, which is higher than the 90 percent target established in its Accountability Plan.

Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)

Parents and guardians of students at Community Partnership are satisfied with the school. As described above, the school administers an annual year-end survey to families. The school reported a response rate of 74 percent for the 2007-2008 survey, and the results were very positive. The high student attendance rate during the 2007-2008 school year is further evidence of parent satisfaction with Community Partnership.

At the time of the Institute's visit, school leaders at Community Partnership reported that the school had an active Parent Teacher Community Cooperative that met monthly and held events to strengthen the connection between families and the school. Parents are also encouraged to attend Family Academies held during the school's Saturday Academy sessions, where relevant issues are discussed with parents and students. The school also reported that many families attend weekly Family Reading events where students and parents read together.

Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)

The day-to-day operations of Community Partnership are effectively managed. The school has recently established a Chief Operating Officer (COO) role at the school in order to reduce the administrative burden on the school leader and allow her to spend more time on instructional leadership. The chief operating officer described meeting weekly with the principal to address short and long term logistical issues. Teachers reported feeling well supported and sufficiently resourced.

The organizational structure of the school provides generally clear lines of accountability with defined roles and responsibilities. Within the school, teachers reported knowing who to go to for the wide range of supports provided. However, as indicated in the previous renewal report, transparency in the board's relationship with the Beginning with Children Foundation (BWCF) continues to surface as an issue. School leaders reported that the relationship between the school's board and the BWCF is "blurred," and at times it is unclear whether directives or requests originate from the board or from the Foundation.

Community Partnership has maintained adequate enrollment and a sufficient waitlist each year. According to Institute records, the school enrolled 289 students in 2008-09.

Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)

The school's Board of Trustees is clearly focused on student achievement and possesses a wide variety of skill sets with which they competently govern the school. During monthly meetings, board members receive regular reports regarding school performance from the principal and the executive director of the Beginning with Children Foundation, a partner organization. In order to stay abreast of school issues, the board has developed an action plan which includes school-wide academic performance measures and benchmarks as well as other organizational capacity goals, including targeted teacher retention rates and metrics to gauge parent and community relations. The board

reported using "real time data," including disaggregated interim assessment and state test results, to inform their decision making. For example, based on lower than expected academic growth in students qualifying for special education services, the board identified improving the quality of the interventions provided to students in this subgroup as a priority and has targeted additional resources to improve their performance.

The board has an annual memorandum of understanding with the Beginning with Children Foundation and has instituted a formal review of the services rendered. As part of the review process, the school's leadership team provides the board with feedback on the Foundation's performance, which is then passed along to the Foundation. The Foundation provides the school with significant back office support around finances, business development, communications and guidance with regard to legal and compliance related issues.

The Foundation also provides the school with a chief academic officer (CAO) who serves as the principal's mentor and conducts the school leader evaluation process. While the CAO heads up the evaluation process, the board of trustees serves as the final evaluator and reserves the right to add or modify the evaluation produced. This is the first year in which the evaluation process has been in place. As part of the process, the CAO prepares quarterly review letters which are summarized in a final end of year evaluation. The evaluation process is structured around a set of indicators of excellence identified by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The board had clear ideas about the principal's strengths and areas identified for continued improvement.

Two of the school's nine board members are now affiliated with the BWCF. These members reported recusing themselves as needed to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The board recently conducted a self-assessment, and in response to their findings, has recruited additional members with legal expertise and connections to the community. In addition, they seek to add an additional member with a background in education.

Board members identified solidifying the school's curriculum and ensuring consistently high quality of instruction as continuing concerns in the near future, with a focus on English language arts as the number one priority. Based on disaggregated student achievement data, board members also identified supporting at-risk students as a necessary focus and have dedicated substantial resources to address the issue. Longer term, the board has considered applying for a revision to its charter to allow them to provide instruction through middle school and has also considered the possibility of owning their own facility to ensure stability.

Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at Community Partnership Charter School on May 19, 2009. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Kevin Flynn (Team Leader) is an Accountability Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He is responsible for providing technical support related to school accountability plans, as well as the reporting and analysis of individual school performance. Prior to joining the Institute in November 2008, Mr. Flynn served as the Chair of the Science Department at KIPP 3D Academy Charter School in Houston, TX, where he authored curriculum, instructed 7th and 8th grade students, coached peers, and managed the Saturday School program. Prior to his service at KIPP 3D Academy, Mr. Flynn served as a science teacher via Teach For America at the John Marshall Middle School, also in Houston. A recipient of the school's Excellence in Teaching Award,

his responsibilities included curriculum development and instruction for at-risk students as well as English Language Learners. Mr. Flynn received his Master's degree in Education, with a concentration in Policy, Organization and Leadership Studies, from Stanford University and his Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from Cornell University.

Hillary Johnson, Ph.D. (External Consultant) is an independent educational consultant with 18 years experience as a teacher, staff developer and researcher. She has conducted over 20 school inspections with the Charter Schools Institute, primarily as a consulting writer. Past projects include providing professional development in reading and writing instruction, analyzing the alignment between standards and curriculum, and designing video-based professional development to support principals in developing instructional monitoring skills. She began her career as a Spanish bilingual teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher in Oakland CA. Subsequently, she served as a Literacy Content Coach and Whole School Change Coach to several Boston Public Schools. Dr. Johnson earned her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, her M.Ed. from Harvard University and her Doctorate of Education from Harvard University with a concentration through its Urban Superintendents Program.

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

Simeon Stolzberg is Director of School Evaluation at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He is responsible for the coordination of school evaluation visits by Institute staff and external consultants, the development of reporting tools/protocols and the production of reports, and he also coordinates internal staff training with regard to school evaluation visits and reporting tools. Prior to joining the Institute, Mr. Stolzberg managed his own consulting practice, advising charter schools across the country in their application and planning phases. He also served as Middle School Director for the Beginning with Children Charter School in Brooklyn, New York. In 2002, as a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Mr. Stolzberg wrote the prospectus and application for the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BArT) in Massachusetts; the school was one of only five schools approved by the state that year. Mr. Stolzberg served as the school's founding principal. Mr. Stolzberg received his Master's Degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, with independent studies in education and political economy, from Williams College.

An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.
Visit the Institute's website at: http://www.newyorkcharters.org/
documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc to see the complete listing of Benchmarks.

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

Evidence Category	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
	State University Renewal Benchmarks
State University Renewal Benchmark 1B **Use of Assessment Data**	**The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and state performance standards; • the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board; • the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; • the school's leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school's academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services; • the school's teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students; • a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; • the school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and • the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1C **Curriculum**	**The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators; • the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school's curriculum framework, identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;

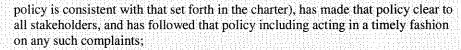|	
	• the curriculum *as implemented* is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans; • teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school's curriculum; • the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and • the curriculum supports the school's stated mission.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1D **Pedagogy**	**High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.** Elements that are generally present include: • teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach; • instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators; • instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school's student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments; • all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time; • learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1E **Instructional Leadership**	**The school has strong instructional leadership.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement; • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement); • the school's instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness; • the school's instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms; • the school's leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas; • the school's instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers; • the school's leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and

	programs where necessary ; and • the school's leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school's academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1F **At-Risk Students**	**The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs; • all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program; • the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students; • the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures; • all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students' Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals; • the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and • the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1G **Student Order & Discipline**	**The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident; • low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1H **Professional Development**	**The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program; • the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional programs; • annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests; • professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school's Accountability Plan goals; • teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own

	professional development activities;
	• the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers' varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities;
	• the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and
	• the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Evidence Category	**State University Renewal Benchmarks**
State University Renewal Benchmark 2A **Mission & Key Design Elements**	**The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.** Elements that are generally present include: • stakeholders are aware of the mission; • the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and • the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2B **Parents & Students**	**Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school; • the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; • few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school; • a large number of parents seek entrance to the school; • parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and • the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2C **Organizational Capacity**	**The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations; • staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school's mission; • the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision; • the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals; • the roles and responsibilities of the school's leadership and staff members are clearly defined; • the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability; • the school's management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key

	personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted; • the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and • the school's management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community, including school staff, parents/guardians and students.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2D **Board Oversight**	**The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school; • the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight; • the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school's management and leaders; • the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity; • the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school's management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school's academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and • the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2E **Governance**	**The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.** Elements that are generally present include: • the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school's goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities; • the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter; • the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner; • the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such

	policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints; • the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; • the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and • the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Charter Schools and the State University of New York

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

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

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

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

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

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits

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

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

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

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

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

Keeping This Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges

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

as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State University Trustees and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;

- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;

- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;

- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;

- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;

- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and

- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

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

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

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

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

has accumulated to date.

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