



FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL THIRD YEAR INSPECTION REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

The third year inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for charter schools authorized by the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute (CSI). The inspection during the school's third year of its charter provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward its academic and organizational goals.

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

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of Family Life Academy Charter School was conducted on February 26, 27, 2004 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

William H. Wibel, Project Manager, SchoolWorks: Bill is a former elementary and middle school principal, visiting practitioner at the Harvard Principals' Center and supervisor of graduate students for Harvard Graduate School of Education and consultant in leadership for SchoolWorks.

Aretha Miller, Project Manager, SchoolWorks : Aretha is an eight year veteran special education teacher in the Boston Public Schools and the former curriculum coordinator for an alternative education program that provides services for at-risk and out-of school youth throughout Massachusetts.

Emilys Peña, School Quality Review Consultant, SchoolWorks: Emilys worked for Boston Public Schools for 10 years as a bilingual special needs teacher for grades K-6, a literacy specialist at the middle school level, and at the high school level as Assistant Headmaster in charge of Teaching and Learning. Mrs. Peña has been involved as a teacher and principal of numerous summer programs targeting students who wish to gain entrance into Boston Exam Schools. She has worked as a consultant for SchoolWorks for over 2 years conducting charter school inspections in Massachusetts and New York, as well as reviews of underperforming and exemplary district schools.

Ledyard McFadden: President, CEO, SchoolWorks: Ledyard taught English as a second language in Costa Rica and later at Chelsea High School in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Ledyard was a founder of the Bridge School in Chelsea, Massachusetts and the Director of Finance and Operations for City on a Hill Charter School in Boston, Massachusetts. Ledyard also served as a regional manager for Beacon Education Management.

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

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

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

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

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

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Family Life Academy Charter School was approved by the State University Trustees in January 2001 and by the Board of Regents that March, and opened September 2001 in a newly renovated space leased from the Latino Pastoral Action Center in the Bronx, New York. For 2001-2002, the school enrolled 99 students in grades K-1 and has added a grade per year to arrive at its current year three enrollment of 187 students in grades K-3. The school serves English language learners in the Highbridge section of the South Bronx where there are a high number of overcrowded and low performing schools.

The school admits new students only in kindergarten with an anticipated five to ten percent attrition rate. This attrition rate reflects the school's understanding that the target population includes recent immigrants and children of low-income families, some of whom reside in shelters and move repeatedly. The school's "kindergarten-only" admission policy is in place to ensure greater learning continuity for the students who choose to enroll. The school is beginning to expand services to its children who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken by providing instruction in Spanish during the school day.

Collaboration and meaningful participation among staff, parents, and the community are the hallmarks of The Family Life Academy Charter School. Parents are welcome in the building and are in evidence on a regular basis. The community is used as a resource to support the academic program and promote the mission of the school. The primary partner organization is The Latino Pastoral Action Center which leases the facility to the school and serves as the primary partner in support of the mission of the school.

Family Life Academy Charter School has in place a comprehensive literacy program based on The Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project, founded and directed by Lucy Calkins. At the center of the Reading and Writing Project is the establishment of reading and writing workshops that function as bases out of which teachers build students' skills by constructing experiences to expose them to a rich literary environment.

The school has implemented a number of initiatives to address its core values. The school started a children's Aikido class to fulfill its mission of inculcating responsibility, integrity and respect in the lives of its students. In addition, a joint service-learning project between students and the New York City Parks Department to plant and maintain a nearby park was instituted. According to the school's principal, the school is investigating many designs for its Spanish instruction some of which include social studies, science, writing and music to be taught in Spanish throughout the school year. Students who require English support are served by bilingual co-teachers and, in one class, a bilingual paraprofessional teaching assistant.

The staff for 2003-2004 includes twelve full time teachers, seven teaching fellows, one principal, and one assistant principal. The assistant principal has the title of Education Director and is responsible for coordinating assessment, delivering professional development, and managing the overall schedule. The principal is the instructional leader in the building.

The board of trustees includes lay and professional members of the community representing the spectrum of the surrounding neighborhoods. The board meets monthly to provide oversight to the administrative team and to monitor the progress of the school's operations and its academic program. The board is extremely passionate and committed to the belief that, given a high quality education, minority students can and will succeed.

Ongoing support for staff competency occurs through the services of consultants who are members of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Leadership Team. These two consultants facilitate assessment training, monthly teacher training, and student work review to enhance collaboration among the staff to refine instructional strategies.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

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

1. Family Life Academy Charter School students demonstrate attainment at or near grade level expectations on the ECLAS (Early Childhood Literacy Assessment Survey).

According to the designers of the ECLAS, the New York City Board of Education in collaboration with McGraw-Hill, the test is designed to measure and monitor the literacy development of young children in Grades K – 3. ECLAS data places each child on a literacy development continuum. The ECLAS helps teachers look at each child’s developmental progress in four strands of literacy skills: 1) Alphabet/Sight Words, 2) Phonemic skills, 3) Reading skills, 4) Writing skills. Each strand is divided into six levels of development, or points on a continuum *Level 1: Getting Ready to Read, Level 2: Emergent Reader/Writer, Level 3: Beginning Reader/Writer, Level 4: Developing Reader/Writer, Level 5: Semi-Independent Reader/Writer, Level 6: Independent Reader/Writer.* “

While the ECLAS is designed as a diagnostic assessment, Family Life Academy school leaders use the results as an indicator of the school’s performance overall. The test is given in the fall of each year to identify students needing special assistance and for some grouping within the grade level and again in the spring to track changes within the year. Results by strand of literacy skills in the test from the last two years of administration are shown in **Table 1**. Student proficiency benchmarks are established by ECLAS as follows:

	Minimum Standards	Target Standards
End of Grade K	Level 1	Level 3
End of Grade 1	Level 4	Level 5
End of Grade 2	Level 6	ECLAS Completed

TABLE 1: Family Life Academy ECLAS Results, Fall, 2001 – Spring of 2003,

Cohort	Alphabet Sight Word Category				Phonemic Awareness Category			
	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03
K011/ 1- 101 Monolingual (current grade 2)	1.0	2.2	2.5	4.5	0.0	2.8	3.2	4.4
K012/1- 121 Bilingual (current grade 2)	0.6	2.3	2.9	4.6	0.0	3.4	3.8	5.1
1 – 101/2-201 Monolingual (current grade 3)	1.0	2.2	2.5	4.5	0.0	2.8	3.2	4.4
1 – 121/2 – 212 Bilingual (current grade 3)	1.9	5.0	5.1	5.8	1.3	4.5	4.5	5.1

TABLE 1: (CONT'D)

	Reading Category				Writing Mechanics Category			
	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03
K011/ 1- 101 Monolingual (current grade 2)	0.0	1.9	2.3	4.3	0.0	2.0	2.8	4.1
K012/1- 121 Bilingual (current grade 2)	0.0	2.2	2.8	4.4	0.0	2.8	3.5	4.6
1 – 101/2-201 Monolingual (current grade 3)	0.0	1.9	2.3	4.3	0.0	2.0	2.8	4.1
1 – 121/2 – 212 Bilingual (current grade 3)	1.3	4.4	4.5	5.3	0.7	4.3	4.2	4.6

According to these results, students in monolingual classrooms in K & 1 (K012 & 1-121) are exceeding the minimum standards and in certain sub tests exceeding the target standards. Students in the bilingual cohort classrooms in K & 1 (K011 & 1-101) are also presently exceeding the minimum standards and in K exceeding the target standards. In reviewing the classroom aggregate scores as reported, two things are in evidence: students leaving K are entering grade 1 with more skills and abilities than in the first year of testing. To determine why there appeared to be a wide range of discrepancy in the scores both up and down, an inter-rater reliability investigation was conducted by the school. The results from the inter-rater reliability suggests several reasons for the difference in scoring, including the differences in time between first and second testing periods allowing for a drop off in performance or an improvement due to summer school attendance. Students whose native language is Spanish are consistently not meeting minimum target standards by the end of grade two. Only 71 percent of second graders met the minimum standard.

2. Family Life Academy Charter School students rank well below the national norm as measured by the Terra Nova norm-referenced test. The first set of second grade scores represent the baseline from which the school will measure progress in future years.

Table 2 shows the results of the first set of scores from the norm-referenced Terra Nova test for the first group of students to reach second grade at the school.

TABLE 2: 2003 Terra Nova Reading & Language Percentile Rank for FLACS 2nd Grade by Language Group

Terra Nova 2003 2 nd Grade Percentile Rank	Reading	Language
201 (<i>n</i> =21) Monolingual	39	29
221 (<i>n</i> =22) Bilingual	18	10
Special Ed (<i>n</i> =2)	n/a	n/a

The percentile rankings shown in the table are far below the norm of 50 considered to represent the average for similar students at this grade level. The Terra Nova rankings can serve as an indicator of the serious deficiencies among FLACS students. The school will be challenged to raise students to the level of proficiency as expected by state and national standards and the school's accountability plan.

This administration of the Terra Nova test will serve to establish a baseline level of performance for the second grade class. This will be used to track progress over time by those students and to infer the quality of the school's programs and their ability to moderate serious student weaknesses. .

3. The school does not yet employ standardized assessments in other areas of the curriculum on which to base additional judgments about student attainment of essential skills and knowledge.

Family Life Academy complies with the requirements of the *Charter Schools Institute Accountability Guidelines* and it has not yet developed a complementary internal assessment system for measuring progress. In the third year of operation, the school is beginning to use rubrics to demonstrate proficiency among its students, but the method for collecting and tracking these assessments is under development. The school is just beginning to develop a common language and understanding of how the rubrics should be used. The rubrics are being developed by FLACS administrators and consultants from Burke Associates.

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

1. At the time of the inspection, Family Life Academy Charter School had only ECLAS results on which to base judgments on the progress their students have made over time. While the use of this assessment as an aggregate measure of school-level performance is not advised, the inspectors used it as the only indicator of overall school-wide change.

ECLAS results are presented in the school's *2002 – 2003 Annual Progress Report* and show comparisons within the 2001-2002 school year. Some results are available for tracking changes from the fall 01 administration of ECLAS to the fall 02 administration, but identification of individual students, while sufficient, was cumbersome to allow accurate comparison across the year.

Table 1, as shown in response to Question 1, allows a comparison of subgroups of students over time. The kindergarten fall scores were higher than the minimum target the school set (level 1). In the aggregate, they made significant gains for fall to spring across all four categories.

**TABLE 5 - Family Life Academy ECLAS Results,
Fall, 2001 – Spring 2003,**

Cohort	Alphabet Sight Word Category				Phonemic Awareness Category			
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Cohort	Reading Category				Writing Mechanics Category			
	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03	Fall 01	Sp. 02	Fall 02	Sp. 03
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1 – 101/2-201 Bilingual (current grade 3)	0.0	1.9	2.3	4.3	0.0	2.0	2.8	4.1
1 – 121/2 – 212 Monolingual (current grade 3)	1.3	4.4	4.5	5.3	0.7	4.3	4.2	4.6

2. As noted in response to Question 1, Family Life Academy has not developed complementary assessments in all areas of the curriculum on which to base a judgment about student progress over time toward attainment of essential skills and knowledge.

The team can not make a definitive judgment about student performance on the rubrics because the instrument is not designed to track progress over time but instead used to assess whether teachers are actually teaching the standards required at each grade level. At the present time, the rubrics are not aligned to classroom curriculum or to the quarterly reports sent to parents.

One exception to the preliminary status of the school's rubrics is the Personal/Social Development rubric. This tool is used to assess students' personal/social development during the course of a year. The Personal/Social Development rubric aligns to the mission of the school, matches student expectations outlined in classroom expectations and its purposes is understood by all members of the learning community. The rubric contains a checklist of sixteen personal and social developmental benchmarks that are rated as Not Yet, in Process, and Proficient. According to the school's *Accountability Progress Report*, students are being rated as less 'proficient' in social development as they move from kindergarten to first grade. The dramatic decline in average measures (100% of K students described as proficient in 'playing well with

peers' contrasted with only 27% of Grade 1 students receiving such a rating) suggests there may be disparities in application of the rubric by different teachers. Without further analysis of the differences between teachers' ratings, the tool does not serve as an accurate measure of school-wide progress toward social performance goals.

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

1. The written academic program at Family Life Academy Charter School is based on New York City and state standards with flexibility within the curriculum to meet the needs of monolingual and multilingual students.

The curriculum allows teachers to use a variety of resources and supplementary materials to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. The school implements a literacy program from Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Students receive 2.5 hours of instruction in reading and writing daily. Teachers use rubrics to assess and track student attainment of skills. Although they are still in the process of refining the procedure for tracking student performance on the rubrics, teachers are able to use them to identify gaps in student learning. The rubrics used by teachers in the classrooms assist students in understanding the quality of work expected.

Professional development is in place to assist teachers to make effective use of the Reader's/Writer's curriculum for students with a range of skills and abilities. Teachers attend a summer retreat where they discuss the methodology behind Reader's/Writer's project and receive help with its implementation at the classroom. This retreat has become an annual event prior to the opening of the school. Embedded in the workshops are opportunities for teachers to design benchmarks and develop rubrics to identify the precise needs of both struggling and advanced students so they can better provide them the necessary support.

The school selected *Everyday Math* for its math program in all grades. *Everyday Math* offers opportunities for investigating math concepts using a range of materials and manipulatives. The teacher is responsible for differentiating math instruction. The inspection team visited four math lessons which varied in instructional methods from teacher-directed whole group instruction to paired learning and small group activities. The approach to instruction appeared to be developmentally appropriate but lacked rigor. In one instance a teacher did not point out what 'share' means in math language to a group of 2nd graders, nor did she try to understand why a group of students had attacked a set of problems in a contrary way to her instructions.

For students whose first language is not English, FLACS is utilizing the bilingual teacher to assist ELL students by providing math instructions in Spanish, making it easier for bilingual students to access the instruction. In addition the school is currently working on a bilingual curriculum that has one unit in social studies, science, writing, and music taught in Spanish during the school year. This design will replace the current practice of trying to teach an hour of Spanish a day, which has proven ineffective in maintaining the level of Spanish either spoken or written for native speakers.

In science the school has adopted *Insights* with supplements the program with activities such as a Family Science Night, science opportunities at Carton Park, and family field trips to science museums, aquariums, and the planetarium. *Insights* is a standards based program that offers the potential for reaching students with a range of skills and abilities. Science was observed on three different occasions in grades one through three. Students engaged in time ‘off task’ during transitions in each of these settings. In one science lab, the lesson included some students reading aloud a multiple choice quiz while other students were working on an experiment with various liquids. There was very little oversight of the experiment raising concerns about monitoring for safety. In follow-up conversations with faculty they did report that there is an attempt to utilize the neighborhood during good weather for science observations and discussion of life science topics.

The Social Studies curriculum is based on the New York City Social Studies curriculum which has a heavy literacy piece and is supplemented by FLACS teachers with community content. The major emphasis of the written curriculum provides teachers with a variety of ways to deliver and assess the content and skills proficiency of students in order to meet the expectations described in the state standards.

2. In some areas, the inspection team observed instructional practices across grade levels that are likely to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Of the thirteen classes visited by the inspection team, there were a range of instructional practices across grade levels. Mini lessons, partner activities (share/pair), guided reading, readers and writers’ workshop, and hands on activities were the types of lessons observed that were well designed and focused, reflecting high expectations for students to engage in critical and creative thinking. However, the quality of implementation of these instructional practices was uneven across the school. In some classes, teachers asked probing questions and closely monitored the responses of students to push their understanding of concepts. In others, lessons required little intellectual involvement on the part of the students. The majority of transitions within classrooms were smooth with little instructional time wasted. Students knew and understood where to go in classrooms when activities changed. In a few cases, teachers were less skilled in orchestrating full use of instructional time.

Teacher assistants and consultants were active in the classroom providing gentle guidance and support to individual students. Various levels of support including push-in and pull out services from consultants and the special education teacher are in place to accommodate students with identified special educational challenges.

3. FLACS has made effective and numerous accommodations to serve students with special needs.

Support for special needs students is offered in various settings. The leadership team and the special services coordinator report that 25 students have Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) qualifying them for services in speech and language therapy. The range of student needs is great -- from (PDD) Pervasive Developmental Disorder, similar to autism, to hearing impairment. The special education coordinator reports that getting Occupational Therapy (OT) services for

students through the regional school district has been a challenge. ELL students receiving special education services work with a bilingual special education teacher. The special education model allows the consultant and special education teacher to provide push-in and pull-out services to small groups of students as designated by the student's IEP. This allows the special education teacher or consultant to work with students in a resource room or their traditional classroom environment when appropriate.

In an interview with the leadership team, the school described "In-house Intervention" that is used before referring students to the NYC regional district CSE (Committee on Special Education). This allows the school to focus its energy and creative ability on solving the child's need before being referred for service. SETS (Special Education Teacher Services) are provided by SPED coordinator and bilingual SPED teacher. They focus primarily on helping students acquire basic skills in math and literacy. The support services coordinator reports that the school makes use of community resources as a way to support some students with special needs.

Family Life Academy Charter School has responded to the needs of diverse learners by sponsoring academic support programs. The programs in place to meet the needs of students struggling to reach proficiency include a Saturday Academy for small group directed instruction and computer assisted instruction. The extended day and year assist with promoting more time to acquire challenging concepts and to practice skills. Classroom libraries are leveled for literacy, supporting the school's balanced literacy approach to instruction. A speech therapist and a counselor were hired to assist students, parents and the existing special education staff. A CSE liaison appointed by the Region assists all charter schools with special education needs.

Teachers College consultants work with teachers to model instructional strategies in the classrooms and are also employing video taping as a way of providing feedback to staff on the effectiveness of their instruction. Teachers at FLACS meet by grade level weekly to discuss and share instructional issues and insights.

The leadership provides feedback to teachers based on frequent informal observations. The principal has matched a skilled teacher with a novice as a way of maintaining the strength of the instructional program at each grade level and providing collaborative sharing of practical wisdom.

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

1. The written curriculum at Family Life Academy Charter School includes benchmarks and performance indicators that are reported to be based on New York State Standards. Teachers are held to high expectations for participation in professional activities.

High expectations for staff and students are suggested by the principal as reflected in her comment, "Everything displayed must have purpose and focus." The team noted throughout its observations and interviews that the principal's standards for high expectations were represented

in various aspects of the school. The staff reported having weekly conversations about teaching and learning. When asked the question “What does a classroom that has high expectations look like?” the principal responded that she expects a literate and print-rich environment, books labeled for student use, areas designed with purpose, bulletin boards with a message that gives parents a sense that what the school is doing represents high standards.” The classrooms at FLACS were print-rich and classroom libraries of leveled books were available to accommodate a range of learning needs.

Stated expectations are high and appropriate because curriculum is aligned to standards and teachers are expected to cover it. For example, The *Everyday Math* series not only requires students to complete practice worksheets but provide them with opportunities to engage in project based learning activities to apply their knowledge of mathematical concepts and demonstrate their mathematical thinking. Some of the work samples reviewed by the inspectors showed high levels of creativity and evidence of student progress toward mastery.

The school has implemented a curriculum that requires teachers to participate in extensive staff development. Teachers and school administrators worked with consultants during the summer to define the benchmarks and rubrics that will measure the performance of students toward the state standards. Teachers feel that the development of the rubrics has lead to clear explanation of expectations in the classroom. . Teachers admitted they are still in the process of aligning the rubrics to the standards but that this is an ongoing challenge and an area where they recognize more staff development is needed.

2. The inspection team observed a range of instructional practices that implement the curriculum standards in challenging ways.

In the thirteen classes visited during the inspection, team members noted a variety of instructional strategies, including centers, flexible groups with meaningful differentiated reading/writing activities, small group, student-centered, one-on-one, conferencing, pair/share, push in, pull out services, questioning that probed for deeper understanding, and circle group activities. The structure of the classroom settings were a balance of student-centered and teacher directed with a level of interactive noise appropriate to the age of the students. Social play and interaction was organized in such a manner that children were able to release pent up energy in a creative and positive manner. Kindergarten students were wholly engaged in lively literacy lessons at circle time. Second graders were thoughtfully completing reader response sentences. First graders were intently discussing drawings to represent their number sentences in math. Overall, classes were active centers for learning. Team members noted that instructional quality was weaker in general in the bilingual classrooms. Students were held to less rigorous standards by the Spanish teachers in the quality of work they produced. Even though the lessons are planned collaboratively, the delivery and expectations for demonstrating learning were less demanding in bilingual classrooms than in monolingual ones.

The inspection team noted a discrepancy between the expectations of students revealed in the work samples provided for review and the generally rigorous expectations displayed in classes visited during the inspection. A review of sixty four pieces of student work indicated that while

the assignments were appropriate to the grade levels, the quality of work exhibited by the students was mixed. Of the sixty four pieces, only 34 were judged to be appropriate quality for the grade level. Kindergarten had the highest percentage of quality work exhibited in the samples. Teachers' assessment of the student work represented in the sample was accurate in 51 out of 64 samples. This statistic bears witness to the school's heavy emphasis on the use of rubrics. Teachers were able to adequately assess the work represented in the work sample regardless of the quality presented.

Variability in the quality of student work paralleled the team's observations of variations in instructional strategies in some classes. According to conversations with administrators and the professional staff, the teachers are working toward gaining instructional expertise and some have been more successful than others in engaging students in well paced, challenging lessons. In notes provided to teachers from the principal as a result of informal class visits, direction is being provided on how to alter classroom instruction that will likely have a positive impact on student performance.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

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

1. Students in the focus group expressed an enthusiasm for the programs in place at The Family Life Academy Charter School.

Overall, the students in the focus group expressed an enthusiasm for the learning opportunities they receive at FLACS. Students were able to cite examples of topics covered in their literacy classes as well describe some of the strategies used to provide instruction. Students cited examples of book report projects and learning about the community as favorite topics. Their 'favorite' activities in school include writing, computers, English and Spanish classes, and lunch. Students were articulate in explaining their work and what they learned from class projects.

2. Parents in the focus group were enthusiastically satisfied with the opportunity provided for their children by Family Life Academy Charter School.

Eleven parents in a focus group expressed satisfaction with the work of the school. Key features of the school that appealed to them were the small class sizes that provide students with academic and emotional support and the school's open door policy.

According to the parents in the focus group, the school has been successful in setting and maintaining high academic standards, which they see as evident in the improvement in the quality of their children's work. The parents with children in Kindergarten are impressed with the fact that they know how to read. They also stated that the school has been successful in establishing a culture that encourages students to take ownership of their own learning. As a result, their children are diligent about completing their homework assignments and take the initiative to read more on their own.

Parents acknowledged that they have input to the school through the Parent Teacher Association, an active parent association that meets monthly. The parent group conducts fundraisers and plans informational activities for parents. Additionally, the school's leadership works hard to create other opportunities for parents to participate in the life of the school. For example, the school sponsors events like "Donuts for Dads Days" and "Muffins for Moms Days" that bring parents into the school to meet teachers and administrators.

The school communicates regularly with parents through written notices and face to face opportunities. It is important to note that communication with parents is always provided in both English and Spanish. Consequently, parents are well informed about what is happening at the school.

Parents expressed a concern that the school was only going to the 5th grade. They are very worried that they will have to send their children back to the public schools in the area they reported as being overcrowded and unsafe. This worry is an indicator that FLACS has become a positive alternative to schools in the South Bronx.

In Family Life Academy Charter School's *2002-2003 Annual Progress Report*, survey results report communication and facilities receiving the strongest response, with 94 percent of parents satisfied with the level of communication they have with their child's teachers and with the school facility their children attend. Ninety - three percent of parents overall are satisfied with the various programs and services at FLACS and 83 percent of parents report children receiving age appropriate homework.

QUESTION 2: Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

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

Management of day to day operations within the building is coordinated among the principal, education director, business manager, and coordinator for special needs services. The board reported high praise for the principal's ability to work together to build upon one another's strengths. The board describes the principal as being effective in curriculum and instruction and student classroom performance. They report the principal's broad range of skills and abilities as the guiding force behind the change at the school.

The education director is responsible for monitoring consultants, assessment, and supporting the principal in the role of instructional leader for the building. The administrative assistant manages enrollment, tracks student and teacher attendance and the fiscal officer and fiscal administrative assistant monitors the finances of the school. The support allows the principal and education director to focus on the daily operations of the school while providing effective instructional leadership to the staff.

The Family Life Academy Charter School Board of Trustees appears to have developed an intimate working relationship with the administrators to promote school functions. Representatives of the board who were interviewed for the inspection are experienced in setting policy and addressing legal compliance issues. They provide both community and in-kind support for the school. The principal submits regular reports on academic and related school topics to ensure that the board understands the educational issues faced by the school.

Family Life Academy also has systems in place to meet the needs of students requiring special services. The special support services coordinator manages the special services provided to students and maintains contact with the special education department in the city district to monitor and address issues to ensure compliance with the child's education plan.

Teacher retention has been steady this year and professional development opportunities are an effective tool for monitoring and enhancing teacher quality at Family Life Academy Charter School. In the first year of the school, three teachers contracts were not renewed. In the second year, almost all staff members were retained. This year, there are preliminary reports evidence that although the staff is young and inexperienced they will be returning.

School Year	2003 – 2004	2002 – 2003	2001 – 2002
Total Number of Teachers	18	14	10
Returning Teachers	12	6	

Family Life Academy Charter School provides ongoing professional development and hires educational consultants to help serve the professional needs of teachers. The consultant services purchased by the school include members of the Teachers college Columbia Reading and Writing Project Leadership Team who provide sustained consultative support and input. As mentioned earlier in this report, consultants support teachers in implementing the curriculum and differentiating instruction. The schedule allows for vertical meeting times and staff development monthly to focus on assessment data, benchmarks and rubrics. The summer curriculum work raises teachers' skills in planning an articulated curriculum that aligns with the New York State Learning Standards.

2. Family Life Academy Charter School carefully uses an external standardized assessment to monitor the progress of individual students and to draw inferences about the effectiveness of the academic program. The school is in the beginning phases of using this data to modify the academic program.

The principal and education director report ECLAS information in their accountability plan to provide insight into individual student performance. ECLAS is a diagnostic assessment that can provide rich descriptions of individual student language abilities, but it is a weaker tool to use as a measure of the effectiveness of the school's academic program. The school conducted an inter-rater reliability refinement for the ECLAS in order to standardize the assessment, but the availability of one year's data is too limited to make strong generalizations. (see question 1) While students are demonstrating growth as measured on ECLAS, they are below the target measure set by the school.

Teachers meet with their partner teacher and in grade level meetings to look at classroom assessment data and make decision about instruction. Teachers are involved in the development of rubrics by implementing them in their instruction and using rubrics to assess student strengths and areas needing improvement. The inspection team was able to observe samples of student work and those pieces of work reinforced the emerging use of academic assessment rubrics. It is not clear how the portfolio assessments tracking individual student performance will be used to make school-wide program decisions, as the school-wide rubrics are still under development and not well matched to the state standards for advanced and proficient work.

The principal and education director visit classrooms and do walkthrough using established protocols on a regular basis. With information and data they have gathered, they meet with staff every Thursday 3:40 – 5:00 pm to review what they have learned. They provide written feedback to individual staff members as well. They analyze student performance data to make decisions about the curriculum and instruction.

The Board meets regularly to review student progress as presented by the leadership. The Board was able to name several measures of student performance. They were able to compare ECLAS results with those of other District 9 schools.

3. The leadership team regularly conducts academic or programmatic reviews.

One of the first tasks performed by the new principal upon her arrival for the 2003-2004 academic year was to conduct an overall review of the school's curriculum and assessment procedures. She looked at teacher preparation and planning time, analyzed communication between teachers about instructional strategies, reviewed the work of the consultants, and made determinations about the effectiveness of the staff development initiatives. In interviews with the administrative team, board and staff, they noted that Spanish professional development for teachers was a direct result of data gathered on the need for teachers to communicate with the number of students and parents entering the school whose native language was Spanish.

Teachers interviewed during the inspection described the culture of the school as one where it is common practice for the principal or education director to informally visit classes 2-3 times a week. Teachers report receiving ongoing written and verbal feedback which guides them in modifying their instruction to meet student needs. Teachers interviewed described their relationship with the principal as a collaborative effort, where the sharing of ideas is ongoing and a focus on student learning is supported.

Decisions about which instructional materials to purchase are derived from data gathered in the classroom by teachers, input from parents, consultants, and the principal. Decisions about teaching and learning are made from assessment data gathered both in the classrooms from local use of rubrics, and by analyzing the results of standardized external assessments.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

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

1. At Family Life Academy Charter School the stakeholders understand the importance of the promises of the school's mission statement.

The inspection team heard reports from Board members, parents, teachers and students praising the design of the educational program implemented at Family Life Academy Charter School. The parents expressed their view of the mission to include empowering students, and getting them ready for the world. Parents expressed their awareness of the need for children to develop coping skills and to have a sense of community. Parents describe the mission as, "Helping kids see that they are somebody and they can succeed," and, "Raising the standard of achievement for children in the community."

In an interview with the Board of Trustees, they expressed a clear understanding of the school's mission and summarized the mission to include these elements:

:Community based vision."

"Charter School as a means of community control."

"Helps students and parents take control of their education."

"Brings school and community together."

The consistency in understanding of the school's mission offers a focal point for engaging stakeholders in working toward common goals and purposes for the benefit the children at FLACS.

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

1. The FLACS program overview states a holistic focus on all aspects of the academic program as the 'special' program of the school. There is clear evidence that the school recognizes the challenge it faces to help all its children reach the levels of proficiency defined by the state standards.

The administrative team, teachers, and board members describe their efforts to meet the challenge of bringing students from all backgrounds to high standards as all encompassing. As revealed in interviews during the inspection, school leaders recognize that attracting and hiring certified competent faculty is one of the first steps in fulfilling that intent. Action steps in place include a long list of critically needed staff development that address math and reading/writing, lesson plan design, teaching and learning strategies, assessment analysis, technology, Spanish, and classroom management. The global focus of the school program raises the level of effort and determination necessary to reach its targets.

One clear expression of the school's appreciation for its undertaking is included in the Accountability Progress Report:

For FLACS to become the school envisioned in the charter, that planning [for improvement] must transcend into training, and that training must translate into practice. We have addressed our most critical issue facing FLACS; the development of appropriate links between curriculum,

instruction, and assessment. This is essential for us to perform at a level enabling us to reach our performance goals. The changing of our learning environment to make sure students reach high standards will be more difficult than our initial establishment of our curriculum standards and performance goals.

In the inspection team's judgment, this acknowledgement of the struggles that lie ahead increases the likelihood of consistent attention to the core issues of teaching and learning essential to improve student achievement.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*****Note to the reader: Family Life Academy Charter School is in the process of revising its Accountability Plan under guidance from the Charter Schools Institute. The plan presented here and the recommendations offered are likely to undergo revisions before the next Accountability Progress Report.***

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS

Goal 1: Student of FLACS will demonstrate proficiency in critical literacy.

Measure 1. FLACS students will show proficiency in the critical literary skills of the Early Childhood Literary Assessment System (ECLAS) along the continuum on the ABC/Sight Words, Phonemic Awareness, Reading, and Writing strands by meeting the following end-of-year benchmarks or higher over three years (K-2): 80% of the second grade class will achieve the minimum standard. Of those students reaching the minimum standard, 70% will achieve the target standard, a population representing 56% of the second grade.

Measure 2. Beginning in 2nd grade, the average national rank in each cohort of FLACS students on the McGraw Hill Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Test will increase by 5 percentiles per year until the average national ranking of the cohort is at 70th percentile

Measure 3. 75% of FLACS students who have been with us for 2 or more years will perform at or above Level Three on the New York State English Language Arts exam (ELA) given each year to all 4th grade students.

Measure 4. FLACS students will meet or exceed 4th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4th grade NY state ELA assessment

Goal 2: FLACS student will become proficient in the application of mathematical skills and concepts.

Measure 1. 70% of students (K-2) will receive a proficient or in process rating on the FLACS math rubric school based measurement utilizing an assortment of assessment techniques such as ongoing assessment and product assessment.

Measure 2. Beginning in 2nd grade, the average national rank in each cohort of FLACS students on the McGraw-Hill Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Test will increase by five percentile points per year until the average national ranking of the cohort is at the 70th percentile.

Measure 3. . 75% of FLACS students who have been with us for 2 or more years will perform at or above Level Three on the New York State Math exam given each year to all 4th grade students.

Measure 4 FLACS students will meet or exceed 4th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4th grade NY state math assessment.

Goal 3: FLACS students will demonstrate proficiency in the practice and methodology of scientific inquiry

Measure 1. 70% of students (K-2) will receive a proficient or in process rating on the FLACS science rubric school based measurement utilizing an assortment of assessment techniques such as ongoing assessment and product assessment.

Measure 2. 75% of FLACS students who have been with us for 2 or more years will perform at or above Level Three on the New York State Science assessment given each year to all 4th grade students.

Measure 3. FLACS students will meet or exceed 4th grade District 9 scores.

Goal 4: FLACS students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of four key social science components; history, geography, civics and economics.

Measure 1. 70% of students (K-2) will receive a proficient or in process rating on the FLACS social studies rubric school based measurement utilizing an assortment of assessment techniques such as ongoing assessment and product assessment.

Measure 2. 75% of FLACS students who have been with us for 2 or more years will perform at or above Level Three on the New York State Social Studies exam given each year to all 5th grade students.

Measure 3. FLACS students will meet or exceed 4th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4th grade NY state Social Science assessment.

Goal 5: English Language Learners/Limited English Proficient (ELL/LEP) students will become Proficient in English while maintaining Spanish as their native language.

Measure 1. LEP/ELL will take New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) every year (K-5) To date, there have been no rubrics designed by the State Education Department to ascertain target levels of proficiency for the students taking this exam. When we receive these performance goals from the state, we will attach them to this plan.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS – RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance its presentation of school and student performance.

For Goal 1- 4 (Literacy, Math, Science & Social Studies)

1. Clearly report the various levels of performance stated as your targets in a table or chart. Show progress toward the target of 56% of the relevant population.
2. In the methodology statement explicitly state the steps that you will take to ensure that the ECLAS will be administered in a reliable manner.
3. As required in the *Accountability Plan Guidelines* from the Charter Schools Institute, represent norm-referenced standardized scores in NCEs to allow for statistical analysis.
4. In the plan's revisions, develop a goal that reduces the gap between actual scores and the 5 NCEs target by a reasonable amount per year.
5. When developing charts showing student progress on assessments, the (N) size should represent the number of students tested. Include both continuing students (cohort) and the full grade level group as appropriate for each test administration.

6. For comparative purposes, use similar demographic schools. Look first to local schools that are demographically similar such as those listed on the NY State Education Department listing of *Similar Schools*. Also compare Family Life Academy scores to district scores.
7. Closely examine the correlation between ECLAS scores collected by the school and the Terra Nova assessments. This information can provide insight into whether ECLAS is providing accurate measures of student progress.

II. Organizational Viability Goals

Goal 6:.. FLACS will utilize resources prudently while delivering a well managed high quality education program.

Measure 1. Provide annual financial audit results showing sound financial practices.

Measure 2. Production and publication of quarterly reports that are shared with all FLACS stakeholders which will show sound financial practices.

Measure 3. Balanced Budgets for the most recent, current, and upcoming fiscal year.

Goal 7: FLACS will develop a school community that embodies its core values of responsibility, integrity, love, celebration of differences, respect, community and unlimited possibilities.

Measure 1. FLACS will achieve an 80% return on the FLACS Parent survey Questionnaire.

The school will achieve an above average rating for a majority of areas surveyed by 70% of respondents

Measure 2. 70% of students (K-2) will receive a “Proficient” or “In Process” rating on the FLACS Personal and Social Development Rubric. Improvement on at least 25% of the rubric items will be exhibited each year by students not reaching a proficient rating.

Improvement is defined as advancing from either “Not Yet” to “In Process” or from “In Process” to “Proficient” on rubric items.

Measure 3. Exhibiting a commitment to excellence, faculty, staff and student attendance will consistently remain at or above 90th percentile

ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS – RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance its presentation of school and student performance.

1. Avoid duplicating administration of the parent survey and mingling the results, since it will invalidate the results and inferences made from the responses. Report the rate of return as a percentage of those distributed as part of the survey results.
2. In order to ensure the desired return rate, provide incentives to parents if necessary.
3. Provide summary evidence of the survey results in your annual progress report
4. Consider tracking parent responses by grade level if the information would be informative.

5. Reduce the number of questions in the survey to increase the likelihood of completion.
6. Align the language of the survey to the charts for ease of reporting and reading.
7. Include a chart to describe the measure of student social development and the meaning of the range of score which would reflect the purpose of the measure. Form and function should follow each other.
8. Consider presenting a yearly chart along with intermediate results to show student behavior trends over time.

****Note: There are no Unique Program Goals listed in the current Family Life Academy Accountability Plan.***

APPENDIX A: FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PROGRESS

Category	Criteria	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse students?	Class visits, interviews, data review, Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Do the school's standards reflect the implementation of high academic expectations?	Review of curriculum documents, student work samples ; confirmation of implementation by class visits
Organizational Viability	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey review
	Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?	Personnel evaluation policies, minutes and agendas of board, staff meetings
Unique Aspects	Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?	Interviews, document reviews
	Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?	Accountability Plan, Progress Reports, other docs unique to each school

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL,

I. Academic Program Goals

Goal 1: Student of FLACS will demonstrate proficiency in critical literacy.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 80% of the second grade class will achieve the <u>minimum</u> standard on ECLAS; 70% of those will achieve the <u>target</u> standard, a population representing 56% of the second grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly present the multiple targets for the ECLAS . • Describe steps taken to assure uniform administration of ECLAS . • Represent Terra Nova results in NCEs. • Develop a reduction goal that reduces the gap between actual scores and target by a suitable percentage per year. • Be sure to report the (N) size for each group tested • Report both grade level groups and matched cohorts. • Use similar demographic schools for comparison
-- scores for each cohort of FLACS students will increase by 5 percentiles per year on the Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Test until the average national ranking of the cohort is at 70 th percentile	
-- 75% of students at FLACS 2 years or more will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts exam (ELA)	
-- FLACS students will meet or exceed 4 th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4 th grade NY state ELA assessment.	
Goal 2: FLACS student will become proficient in the application of mathematical skills and concepts.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 70% of students (K-2) will receive a <i>proficient</i> or <i>in process</i> rating on the FLACS school based math rubric.	(see recommendations above)
-- scores for each cohort of FLACS students will increase by 5 percentiles per year on the Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Test until the average national ranking of the cohort is at 70 th percentile	
-- 75% of students at FLACS 2 years or more will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Mathematics exam	
-- FLACS students will meet or exceed 4 th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4 th grade NY state math assessment.	
Goal 3: FLACS students will demonstrate proficiency in the practice and methodology of scientific inquiry	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- 70% of students (K-2) will receive a <i>proficient</i> or <i>in process</i> rating on the FLACS school based science rubric measurement.	(see recommendations for goal 1)
-- 75% of students at FLACS 2 years or more will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science exam	
-- FLACS students will meet or exceed 4 th grade District 9 scores.	

Goal 4: FLACS students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of four key social science components; history geography, civics and economics.	
-- 70% of students (K-2) will receive a proficient or in process rating on the FLACS school based social studies rubric measurement	(see recommendations for goal 1)
-- 75% of students at FLACS 2 years or more will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies exam	
-- FLACS students will meet or exceed 4 th grade District 9 scores as measured on the 4 th grade NY state Social Science assessment.	
Goal 5: English Language Learners/Limited English Proficient (ELL/LEP) students will become Proficient in English while maintaining Spanish as their native language.	
-- LEP/ELL will take New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) every year (K-5).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State targets not yet defined

II. Organizational Viability Goals

Goal 6... FLACS will utilize resources prudently while delivering a well managed high quality education program.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- Annual financial audit results showing sound financial practices.	SUNY Charter Schools Institute will conduct an assessment of the school’s financial accountability goals
-- Production and publication of quarterly reports that are shared with all FLACS stakeholders which will show sound financial practices.	
-- Balanced Budgets for the most recent, current, and upcoming fiscal year.	
-- Balance sheets with profit and loss for most recent fiscal year will show sound financial practices.	
-- Statement of accounting practices will show sound financial practices.	
Goal 7: FLACS will develop a school community that embodies its core values of responsibility, integrity, love, celebration of differences, respect, community and unlimited possibilities.	
Proposed Measures	Recommendations for the school to consider:
-- achieve an above average rating for a majority of areas surveyed by 70% of respondents (with an 80% return) on the FLACS Parent survey Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer the survey once. Provide incentives to parents if necessary. Simplify by reducing the number of questions Align the language of the survey to the charts Include % and the (N) Consider modifying the A – F rating
-- 70% of students (K-2) will receive a “Proficient” or “In Process” rating on the FLACS Personal and Social Development Rubric;. Improvement on at least 25% of the rubric items by students not meeting proficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include a chart of results to support the measure. Do a yearly chart or intermediate benchmarks to show trends over time.
--faculty, staff and student attendance will consistently remain at or above 90 th percentile.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the percentile standard against which measure will be compared



Charter Schools Institute

State University of New York

FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL THIRD YEAR REPORT FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Scope and Methodology

CSI staff performed a desk review of the school's quarterly financial reports, budgets, annual financial statement audit reports, and other correspondence. The review covered documents received during the period from the date the school was chartered, May 15, 2001, through December 31, 2003. The results of this analysis are provided below.

Financial Reporting

The school has complied with its financial reporting requirements with three significant exceptions. The annual budget for the 2002-2003 school year and the annual audit reports for the years ended June 30, 2002 and 2003 were all filed significantly (more than three months) late. For the most recent audit, the school did provide weekly updates of the progress of the audit to CSI as requested. Financial reporting is most useful for the school board, CSI, and SED when it is timely. Quarterly financial reports were generally filed on time or within one week of the applicable due date.

The audit report opinions for the years ended June 30, 2002 and 2003 were unqualified, indicating the financial statements were fairly presented, in all material respects, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Audits were conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. However, the audit for the year ended June 30, 2003 was not conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* as required. Section 5.3 of the charter specifies that the school must require its auditor to issue a report on compliance with laws, regulations, contracts and grants and on internal control over financial reporting. These reports are required by *Government Auditing Standards* and were not included as part of the school's audit report. A management letter was not issued in either year.

Financial Condition as of June 30, 2003

The school completed the year in moderately stable financial condition. The school had an unrestricted net assets of \$377,051 (\$2,417 per approved number of enrolled students) while the

net cash used by operating activities was \$93,944. Total net assets decreased from the prior year by \$17,463.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$198,598 that consist furniture, equipment, and leasehold improvements. The school has no long-term debt, but has commitments under operating leases to make payments totaling \$402,600 through fiscal year 2006 (\$134,200 per year).

Contributions were negligible, which indicates the school was not dependent on variable income for its critical financial needs.

Recommendation

1. Improve procedures to ensure that the School's annual financial statement audit report is filed on a timely basis.
2. Ensure that future audits are conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.