



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

## **Renewal Report**

# **Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York**

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

## **REPORT INTRODUCTION**

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

Information about the State University’s renewal process, as well as an overview of the requirements for renewal under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended, the “Act”), are available in the [Appendix](#) of this report. Note too that the Institute’s website provides additional details and resources regarding renewal, including: the Institute’s comprehensive *Charter Renewal Handbook*, at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm).

## **RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Recommendation**

### **Short-Term Planning Year Renewal of One Year**

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Trustees approve the Application for Renewal of Girls Preparatory Charter School of New York (“Girls Prep”) and renew the charter through and including July 31, 2010 with authority to provide instruction to students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade with a projected enrollment of 248 students, and consistent with the other terms set forth in its Application for Renewal.

### **Required Findings**

Based on all the evidence submitted in the Application for Renewal, the Institute makes the following findings required by the Act. Girls Prep as described in its renewal application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner in the next charter period. In addition, given the programs it will offer, its structure and its purpose, approving the school to operate through and including July 31, 2010 is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2). Finally, granting a one year short-term planning year renewal will assist in building the school’s academic record which will result in sufficient data to be analyzed as part of the Institute’s full renewal review.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

## **Consideration of School District Comments**

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the school district in which the charter school is located regarding the school's Application for Renewal, and public and non-public schools in the same geographic area. Through the date of this report, no comments were received in response.

## **Summary Discussion**

### *Academic Success*

Now in its third year of operation, Girls Prep serves students in Kindergarten through the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. As of this writing, test scores from 2007-08, the first year in which the school administered state assessments are not yet available. As a result, none of the required measures in the school's Accountability Plan applied. In 2006-07, based on results from the Terra Nova, students were performing above the national norm in both English language arts and mathematics. While these results are encouraging, it remains to be seen whether student performance on internal assessments is predictive of performance on state assessments.

Girls Prep has replaced the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS) with the Rigby PM Ultra Benchmark Kit and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments. In 2006-07 on the Rigby assessments the school reported that 95 percent of kindergarten students, 87 percent of 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 82 percent of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade were at or above the grade level benchmark. On the spring Terra Nova, all three grades' performance was well above the national norm. The average kindergarten performance was 63 NCE. The average 1<sup>st</sup> grade performance was also 63 NCE, up from 58 in the fall, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade was 64 NCE, up from 57 in the fall.

In mathematics, all three grades finished the year above the national norm based on results from the spring Terra Nova exams, and both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade made demonstrated growth during the school year. The average spring NCE for kindergarten was 55. The 1<sup>st</sup> grade had an average NCE of 57, up from 43 in the fall. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade had an average NCE of 69, up from 43 in the fall.

The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.

In the school evaluation report generated as a result of the Institute's Second-Year Inspection Visit, inspectors reported that the school board was knowledgeable about and understood its role and responsibilities regarding school oversight, and had established structures and systems to carry out its duties. At that time, the school board demonstrated a strong commitment to the improvement of student performance as well as the use of data-driven instruction. In addition, inspectors noted that the school's focus on professional development had shifted from topics related to establishing school culture to instruction and assessment in its second year. However, inspectors also found that staff turnover in administrative and teaching fellows remained an area of concern. Notably, at the time of the visit the school had recently discontinued its relationship with its founding principal. The school lacked someone with the authority and expertise needed to supervise and evaluate teachers' progress, as well as someone to set clear priorities for teacher performance. Inspectors also found that well-articulated goals and student learning objectives linked to the state standards had not yet been developed, particularly in English language arts and mathematics, and that while the school's faculty

understood the importance of data-driven decision making, at the time of the visit there was little evidence to suggest that the assessments were indeed being used effectively to drive instruction.

According to the school's application for short-term planning year renewal, Girls Prep has taken steps to address the concerns raised within the evaluation report. In particular, the application notes that the school has hired a new school principal. Hired in July 2007, the new school leader worked throughout the summer alongside the school's English language arts and mathematics curriculum specialists to align the curriculum in those subject areas with state standards. The application also notes that the school has been engaged in ongoing work to do the same for the content areas of social studies, science, and writing. To address concerns regarding effective use of student assessment data to drive instruction, the school's curriculum specialists redesigned the assessment system at Girls Prep to ensure alignment with the new curriculum. The school reported that assessments are administered every eight weeks, and the curriculum specialists and school principal meet with teachers by grade level to discuss strategies to address student weaknesses identified by the assessments. Subsequent instruction is closely monitored by curriculum specialists, who also provide coaching to the school's teachers.

### *Organizational Effectiveness and Viability*

Girls Prep has been sufficiently governed during its first three years of operation. According to its application for short-term planning year renewal, of the twelve original board members eight continue to serve the school in that capacity. The school's current board consists of eleven members. Although the school chose not to continue its relationship with its founding principal, it has maintained the same executive director since submitting the original application to establish the charter school. The executive director maintains oversight over the school as a whole, and is assisted by a director of finance and operations and a director of student and family affairs, in addition to the principal.

The school has identified various indicators to assess its organizational viability, including parent satisfaction; attendance; teacher recruitment; and student recruitment.

Approximately 33% (55 of 169) families with students enrolled at the school completed a satisfaction survey in December 2007. Of the respondents, 99% indicated that they are satisfied with the academic progress of their daughters, and 100% of respondents felt that Girls Prep has high expectations for their daughters. However, information regarding responses to the remaining eleven questions on the survey was not provided in the school's application for short-term planning year renewal, and the limited response rate makes it difficult to determine whether the responses are representative of the school's parents and guardians as a whole.

The school has set an ambitious goal for itself with regard to daily student attendance, setting the bar at 98%. During the 2006-07 school year Girls Prep was able to attain an average daily attendance rate of 93%, and attributes its failure to meet the high bar of 98% to a few students who accumulated multiple absences. The school reports that it regularly calls the homes of students who are absent, and will require the family to meet with the school principal if absences persist. The school also tracks student tardiness, and reported in its application for short-term planning year renewal that, on average, 89% of its students arrive on time.

With regard to teacher recruitment, the school stated that it maintains a rigorous hiring process, including multiple interviews by a committee of Girls Prep staff members (including the executive

director, principal, a teacher, teaching fellow, and the director of finance and operations), a written statement about the candidate's desire to teach in a single-sex environment, teaching a model lesson, and a feedback session with the school's principal. The school does not, however, discriminate on the basis of gender in its hiring decisions.

### *Fiscal Soundness*

Since its inception, the school has operated close to the long range fiscal plan included in its original charter application. Girls Prep completed its second operating year in a stable financial position. At the start of this school year, net assets totaled just over \$260,000.

The school has been provided space at essentially no cost by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). Girls Prep currently occupies the entire fifth floor of the Roberto Clemente Educational Complex. However, the school plans to relocate to nearby P.S. 188 (also located within Community School District 1) for the 2008-09 school year and through the remainder of its current charter period. The school's new home, likely to be located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors of P.S. 188, will include thirteen classrooms, three administrative offices, as well as shared use of the auditorium, library, computer lab, lunch room, gymnasium and yard. This space will also be provided to the school by the NYCDOE at essentially no cost.

The school did file about half of its financial reports late over the past two fiscal years. However, Girls Prep had unqualified fiscal audits for each of the past two years, and no management letters were issued.

The budget for the renewal year shows a surplus. In addition, because the new per pupil rates are higher than previously anticipated, the school could expect an even larger surplus at the end of the renewal period.

### *Plans for the Next Charter Period*

Should the school be awarded a short-term planning year renewal, it seeks to expand instruction through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This request is consistent with the school's original charter application and charter, as it was originally granted authority to provide instruction in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. However, as a result of the school's decision to take a planning year, its original charter was amended in May 2004, limiting the school's expansion to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

The school would implement the 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum submitted as part of its original charter application, and approved by the Institute in 2004. The school also proposes some non-material modifications to its educational program, including the addition of the Stern Math program as a resource to be used in conjunction with its existing curricular program, the Recipe for Reading program, and the inclusion of an Orton-Gillingham based approach to its reading group instruction. The school has made appropriate adjustments to its staffing plan and school budget to reflect these changes. In addition, the school proposes to integrate technology education into instruction in each of the core academic areas, in lieu of offering a stand-alone technology class.

With the exception of the addition of paraprofessionals and teaching staff consistent with the addition of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the last year of its proposed charter, the school has not significantly amended its management structure or staffing plan. Girls Prep has made other slight modifications to its organizational structure and school budget, including the hiring of a director of finance and

operations in lieu of the administrative assistant contemplated in its original charter. The school has also hired a director of student and family affairs in place of a part-time social worker and added a part-time school aide.

According to the school's application for short-term planning year renewal, Girls Prep would enroll a new kindergarten class of approximately 48 students, fill seats emptied through attrition, and add a 5<sup>th</sup> grade for the, 2009-10 school year. The total projected enrollment would be 248 students for the 2009-10 school year, with an actual enrollment range of 210 students to 273 students. These figures are amended slightly from the school's original charter application, as the NYCDOE requested, and the school complied, to decrease the number of sections it offers per grade from three to two due to facility constraints. However, the school's new space in P.S. 188 contains sufficient space for the planned expansion.

Girls Prep proposes to reduce the number of instructional days from 192 to 190. It was originally chartered with 200 school days but sought a reduction when it requested a planning year in 2004.

The school's Accountability Plan would be amended under the guidance of Institute staff, primarily to reflect the addition of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade, as well as other updates required by the Institute.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The State University Trustees approved the application for Girls Prep on January 27, 2004, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on March 23, 2004. The charter will expire on March 23, 2009 unless renewed. After taking a planning year in 2004-05, the school opened in August of 2005 in NYCDOE space at 333 East Fourth Street, Fifth Floor, New York, New York, with an enrollment of 90 students in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grades. Girls Prep then added one grade in each of the next two years, enrolling 139 students in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 2007-08. The school plans to continue to grow one grade each year. The founders of the school eventually hope to expand the program to include middle and high school grades.

The school's mission statement is as follows:

*Our mission is to provide a nurturing single-sex environment and a rigorous education that will enable the girls of Girls Prep to learn to read, write, think critically and perform mathematically at levels that exceed city-wide averages. Our goal for Girls Prep students is that they achieve academic excellence, learn skills for success in life and in college, acquire confidence in themselves and their abilities, learn healthy lifestyle habits, and develop a sense of personal responsibility and a commitment to making a contribution to society.*

The founders of Girls Prep stated in the original charter that they “believe that girls and boys have different ways of learning, that single-sex schools give each the ability to grow in an environment that understands their differences, and that all children should have the option to attend a single-sex school.” The charter’s Executive Summary states that Girls Prep will achieve its mission through the following design elements of the school:

- high academic standards in a college preparatory environment;
- a maximum of 22 students per classroom;
- a rigorous educational approach stressing basic skills, literacy, reading comprehension, critical thinking, math, science and social studies;
- a longer school day and year;
- extensive professional development of teachers together with incentives for performance;
- school uniforms for students and a dress code for teachers;
- clearly articulated and consistently upheld behavior standards;
- accountability for academic performance as well as attendance and adherence to the uniform policy;
- not labeling students, but rather allowing their individual learning styles to be understood though not used as an excuse;
- holding students accountable for their behavior and progress and celebrating their individual accomplishments;
- students will be taught good habits regarding nutrition and physical exercise;
- a focus on ethics and personal responsibility; and
- the school is committed to encouraging parental involvement, including classroom volunteers and board representation.

**School Year (2007-08)**

192 Instructional Days (originally chartered with 200)

**School Day (2007-08)**

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.<sup>2</sup>

**Enrollment**

	<b>Original Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Revised Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Actual Enrollment<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Original Chartered Grades</b>	<b>Revised Grades Served</b>	<b>Actual Grades Served</b>	<b>Complying</b>
<b>2004-05</b>	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning year	N/A
<b>2005-06</b>	140	90	<b>90</b>	K-2	K-1	<b>K-1</b>	YES
<b>2006-07</b>	200	155	<b>139</b>	K-3	K-2	<b>K-2</b>	YES
<b>2007-08</b>	260	177	<b>179</b>	K-4	K-3	<b>K-3</b>	YES
<b>2008-09</b>	320	214		K-5	K-4		

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>2005-2006</b>		<b>2006-2007</b>	
	<b>% of Enroll. Girls Prep Charter</b>	<b>% of Enroll. Community District #1</b>	<b>% of Enroll. Girls Prep Charter</b>	<b>% of Enroll. Community District #1</b>
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0 %	1.0 %	NA	NA
Black or African American	56.0 %	19.0 %	NA	NA
Hispanic	43.0 %	52.0 %	NA	NA
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.0 %	16.0 %	NA	NA
White	1.0 %	12.0 %	NA	NA

Source: 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card.  
2006-07: New York State Education Department Database.

<sup>2</sup> According to the school’s original Charter, 8:00 - 8:30 a.m. is used as a time for student arrival, breakfast, and welcoming, while 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. is used as a homeroom, study hall, and performing arts.

<sup>3</sup> Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 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.

Free/Reduced Lunch	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Girls Prep Charter	% of Enroll. Community District #1	% of Enroll. Girls Prep Charter	% of Enroll. Community District #1
Eligible for Free Lunch	61.0 %	63.0 %	42.6 %	53.3 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	11.0 %	8.0 %	29.4 %	6.8 %

Source: 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card  
2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

### School Charter History

School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
2004-05	Planning Year	NO		School received authorization to change enrollment levels and school calendar.
2005-06	1 <sup>st</sup>	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
2006-07	2 <sup>nd</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
2007-08	3 <sup>rd</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report (pending)	Submitted application for Short-Term Planning Year Renewal

## **APPENDIX**

### **An Overview of Renewal Requirements**

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

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.<sup>4</sup>

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

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the State University Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).<sup>5</sup>

### **Statutory and Regulatory Considerations**

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. There is no limitation upon the number of times that a charter may be renewed. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application:

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;

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<sup>4</sup> See § 2850 of the New York Education Law.

<sup>5</sup> The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at [www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org).

- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.<sup>6</sup>

The Institute’s processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.<sup>7</sup>

As a charter authorizing entity, the State University Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings (“Required Findings”):

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner;
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act; and,
- (if applicable) in a school district where the total enrollment of resident students attending charter schools in the base year is greater than five percent of the total public school enrollment of the school district in the base year: (i) granting the application would have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the proposed charter school; or (ii) the school district in which the charter school will be located consents to such application.<sup>8</sup>

Where the State University Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.<sup>9</sup> The Regents may approve the proposed charter or return the proposed charter to the State University Trustees with the Regents’ comments and recommendation(s). In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the current charter expires. In the latter case (return to the State University Trustees), the State University Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents’ comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the State University Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law; as above, it will become operational upon expiration of the current charter.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Education Law § 2851(4).

<sup>7</sup> Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute’s website. See [www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm).

<sup>8</sup> See Education Law § 2852(2).

<sup>9</sup> See Education Law § 2852(5).

<sup>10</sup> See Education Law §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b).

## **Process for Short-Term Planning Year Renewals**

This report contains the findings and recommendations of the Institute regarding a school's application for charter renewal, specifically, a short-term planning year renewal.

Because the charter period begins upon final approval of the proposed charter (as opposed to upon the commencement of the school's operation), charter schools that have taken one or more planning years come to renewal with, at most, three years of data regarding school and student performance. The limited time of operation (and the concomitant reduced amount of student assessment outcomes) makes it extremely difficult for the Institute to determine any trends in student performance as well as make a well-reasoned determination as to whether the school should be renewed for a full-term of five years. To address this issue, the State University Trustees approved the use of the short-term planning year renewal option. This option is available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools are able, with limited though legally and programmatically sufficient review, to obtain renewal for a period equal to the number of planning years taken. In turn, therefore, a school will not be required to seek renewal for a full-term of five years until it has been in operation for at least four full years.

The Institute's protocol for short-term planning year renewal is based on the same fundamental questions all schools must address in applying for renewal of their charters:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school an effective, viable organization?
3. Is the school fiscally sound?
4. What are the school's plans for the term of the next charter and are they reasonable, feasible and achievable?

The Institute also makes the same legal findings as it does for any Application for Renewal submitted to it. However, in the case of a short-term planning year renewal, where the renewal period is for a limited period, the Institute employs a somewhat abbreviated process to determine its recommendation and make the necessary findings.

In addition to the application itself, the Institute reviews the following sources of evidence in making a determination on an application for short-term planning year renewal.

1. **Academic Success:** the Institute will review the school's most recent Accountability Plan Progress Report (due each year that the school has been in operation on August 1<sup>st</sup>), and, as needed and available, any prior Accountability Plan Progress Reports that the school has filed. Where school's file for short-term planning year renewal early in the initial renewal period, the information that is available is likely to be limited.
2. **Effective, Viable Organization:** the Institute will conduct a desk audit of the school's visit and inspection reports, if any have been promulgated. This will include visits conducted by the Institute or other entities, such as the State Education Department (SED) or other external reviewers. In addition, the Institute will review records regarding the school's compliance with existing laws, regulations and policies to determine whether the school has been in

substantial compliance. The Institute will review other information as it deems necessary, including copies of board minutes.

3. Fiscal Soundness: the Institute will refer to the most current desk audit of the school and will review other related materials and documents as it deems necessary.
4. Future Plans: the Institute will look primarily at the school's plans as set forth in the Application for Renewal. The Institute will take cognizance of other data in its possession to determine the reasonableness of the school's proposed plans, especially where the school proposes a new program, a different management structure, additional grades or other significant changes.

Finally, the Institute reserves the right to make a renewal inspection visit where necessary, although doing so would be the exception and not the rule with regard to short-term planning year Applications for Renewal.

The Institute then prepares a renewal report, which is reviewed by key staff members. The report is then transmitted to the Committee on Charter Schools of the State University Board of Trustees, the other members of the State University Trustees, and the school itself. This report is the product of that process.