



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

KING CENTER CHARTER SCHOOL
THIRD YEAR INSPECTION REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The third year site visit to King Center Charter School was conducted on February 24-25, 2003 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

- Dr. Karen Laba, Project Manager, SchoolWorks; former middle and high school science teacher, preservice science teacher educator and supervisor, and consultant in accountability system design and implementation for SchoolWorks.
- Aretha Miller, Program Manager –Diploma Plus, Commonwealth Corporation, Boston, MA; eight year veteran special education teacher in the Boston Public Schools, currently developing and supporting implementation of programs for at risk students through traditional and alternative settings.
- Dr. Craig Flood, President, CPFlood Associates; educational consultant with special practice in the professional training for faculty and administrators in the design of equitable learning environments and safe schools; formerly a special education teacher and administrator at residential facilities in the Albany area.

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 the annual *Accountability Progress Report*, the original charter application, and reports from previous informal site visits by the Charter Schools Institute. At the school, the team interviewed school administrators, Board representatives, staff, parents, students, and visited classes to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its

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

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

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

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

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

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

King Center Charter School is in its third year of operation, opening in September 2000 with 80 students in grades K-3. The school occupies a renovated church that is a designated historic landmark. Many of the distinctive architectural features of the church were retained, from the heavy oak doors entering from the street to the massive vaulted ceiling to the choir loft lined with the now silent organ pipes. The school is nested comfortably in its unique setting with classroom spaces defined by seven foot walls, bathroom facilities, bookcases, dividers and other constructions to create a sense of permanence within an adapted space. Since the walls do not completely enclose separate classrooms, teachers use wireless microphones feeding into directional speakers to be heard by their students without disturbing connecting classes.

The school has grown since its inception to include fourth grade and its current enrollment consists of 105 students served by five classroom teachers and five assistant teachers, and part time physical education and Spanish teachers. An additional full time teaching assistant/ meals monitor supports the work of the Spanish and Physical Education teachers. Support services for special needs students are provided by contractors. Specialists manage many of the other school functions, including a counselor, Home Connection Coordinator, Records/ Reports Coordinator, and Director of Special Projects. The technology specialist not only teaches classes but maintains the school's assessment data and its growing electronic portfolio files.

The King Center Charter School grew out of a pilot program within the Buffalo Public Schools as a demonstration center for the development of alternative assessment models for primary grade children. Conflicts between alternative assessment and state/ city mandates eventually made it difficult to persist within the demonstration model, pilot project leaders applied for and received one of the first SUNY authorized charters. The school is sponsored by the King Urban Life Center, a major social service agency and advocate for the central Buffalo community. The charter school shares several of its board members with the KULC board. Both the King Urban Life Center and the King Center Charter School provide rich programming for the surrounding community, focusing on serving the holistic needs of urban families.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

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

- 1. On the Woodcock Johnson Reading Diagnostic Test, students at King Center Charter School rank between one and fifteen NCE units below the national norm for grades K through 4. In mathematics, King Center students rank lower, between ten and twenty NCE units below the national norm.**

The school administers the Woodcock Johnson assessments as a standardized measure to compare King Center students to a national sample, and to track student progress over time. The initial administration of the reading diagnostic in spring, 2001 offered a description of students who are somewhat below national norms in reading. The first administration of the mathematics assessment in spring 2002 describes a student population that is significantly below the national average in mathematics.

King Center Charter School -- Woodcock Johnson (NCE ranks)

	Reading				Mathematics	
	n*	2001	n	2002	n	2002
Kindergarten	20	37			(not avail)	32.15
Grade 1	18	49.9	20	42.85		40.1
Grade 2	13	46.7	18	47.3		42.81
Grade 3	12	34.25	13	43.5		38.37
Grade 4			12	34.42		34.88

*Reading scores include continuing students only

Schools in the Buffalo City district do not administer the Woodcock Johnson, so consultants hired by King Center negotiated with a school geographically and demographically similar to King Center to administer the Woodcock to a sample of their students. Kindergarten and third grade King Center students matched the performance of the students in the similar school. Second graders at King surpassed the rank of their peers and first graders scored below the comparison group.

Comparison of King Center and 'Similar' Buffalo School Woodcock Johnson Reading, 2002 (NCE)

(NCE)	K	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
KCCS	40.3 (n = 20)	42.43 (n = 21)	46.90 (n = 21)	43.47 (n = 18)
'similar school'	41.32 (n = 19)	45.50 (n = 14)	32.78 (n = 18)	41.76 (n = 21)

While King Center students approximate the rank of students in a similar Buffalo school in reading, they do not match the performance of a national sample, particularly in mathematics.

In 2002, the first group of King Center students in fourth grade took the New York State assessments in English Language Arts and mathematics. Only 11% of King Center students achieved proficiency in English Language Arts and 6% in mathematics.

**NYS ELA and Mathematics Assessments – King Center Charter School (2002)
(Buffalo City Schools scores for 2000)**

	ELA	Mathematics
Proficiency Level	n = 18	n = 18
4	0% (BCS = 5%)	0% (BCS = 8%)
3	11% (BCS = 28%)	6% (BCS = 35%)
2	61% (BCS = 47%)	44% (BCS = 41%)
1	28% (BCS = 20%)	50% (BCS = 16%)

The performance of King Center students on the state assessments is considerably far below adequate proficiency levels. No KCCS students reached Level 4 in either ELA or mathematics and the school's 89% failing rate in ELA and 94% failure rate in mathematics indicate significant shortcomings. The comparison between recent KCCS performance and the results for Buffalo City Schools from two years ago reveal that King Center students fail to come close to matching the proficiency levels of students in the sending district.

King Center fourth graders also took the NYS Science Assessment in 2002. Average score for the 18 KCCS students was 22, well below the state minimum of 30 for proficiency designation. On the 2000 test, Buffalo City School District's fourth graders averaged a score of 28, with 46% of the students reaching the state minimum. Only four (22%) of KCCS students reached that standard on the 2002 test.

2. In addition to its academic mission, King Center Charter School strives to enable students to acquire and demonstrate appropriate social skills and behavioral standards. From their observations during the visit, Inspectors judged that students were respectful to adults and to one another, and generally responsive to instruction.

During the inspection, team members visited all five classes for time periods ranging from fifteen to thirty minutes. In each case, teachers were observed using common management strategies to redirect student attention, including "Take a break" and "One, two, three, eyes on me." Overall, students were attentive and responsive to class instruction, whether whole group or small group activities. Few instances of disruption were noted. Classrooms displayed posters listing the self-control strategies used by King Center staff with students needing intensive interventions: "Stop, Breathe and Think, Decide and Act." Students understood the 'take a break' command and followed the suggestion without objection. The school credits its adoption of Responsive Classroom strategies and extensive training for all staff with the calm, orderly climate at the school.

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

- 1. The Woodcock Johnson is the standardized measure used at King Center Charter School to track student progress over time. Over two years of testing, students continuing at the school score at similar levels over time, with minor increases and minor declines among particular groups.**

**King Center Charter School: Progress over Time
Woodcock Johnson Reading Diagnostic (NCE)**

	n	2001	2002
K/ grade 1	20	37.0	42.85
grade 1/grade 2	18	49.9	47.3
grade 2/ grade 3	13	46.7	43.5
grade 3/ grade 4	12	34.25	34.42

The twelve third graders continuing at KCCS for fourth grade achieved a similar rank both years on the Woodcock Johnson diagnostic test. Second graders declined slightly on their third grade score, as did first graders moving to second grade. The 2001 kindergarten class increased slightly more than 5 NCEs* when they took the test in first grade. With its small number of students in each cohort, it is not possible to make reliable generalizations from the longitudinal data for King Center students. However, overall, student performance varies little within this one year time frame.

While the school regularly collects and records information about student progress in literacy along a detailed continuum for reading, writing, and listening/ speaking, the information is not collected in a way that would allow it to be used to make generalizations about group progress. The Literacy Portfolio captures important details about individual student proficiency in a number of aspects of literacy development, and serves as an important tool for internal diagnostic use and for communicating student performance information to parents. However, the scale is not standardized for comparison between individuals or for summation by grade level.

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

- 1. King Center Charter School provides appropriate supports for challenged students, including contracted Special Education services and related services for speech and language, as well as informal tutoring by classroom teachers and a Saturday program staffed by volunteers. Enrichment for accelerated students is coordinated by the classroom teacher and the librarian and integrated with the core curriculum.**

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

The King Center Charter School contracted with Summit Educational Services to provide specialized instruction for the school's identified special needs students. Dissatisfaction with the services offered by the Buffalo City School District led to the private contract agreement with Summit. Services are suitable and appropriate to the number of KCCS students with identified needs. Speech and language services are provided by district personnel who visit the school regularly to serve the population at King Center CS.

Individual tutoring is provided by teachers and assistant teachers during the school day for students struggling with particular concepts or deficient in specific skills. A special program coordinated by the school's librarian brings students from the community to the school on Saturday mornings for tutoring in core subjects (reading and math) by a cadre of college student volunteers. The school reported that an average of 25 children regularly attend the Saturday program, the majority of whom are King Center students, but which includes other students from the neighborhood who attend district schools.

The enrichment program invites a group of identified students from each class to serve as the class "research team," spending time with the librarian to conduct research on curriculum topics to share with the rest of the class. Students use internet and print resources to identify material that will enhance the class' work on varied projects.

In addition to the structured supports for diverse student needs described above, the classrooms observed by the team demonstrated effective use of differentiation to provide support for students with different learning paces and styles. Student-selected reading materials are coded to identify level of difficulty, and teachers gently revise a student's 'choice' of book to assure appropriate challenge. In one class, students circulated among different work stations, including computer work, seat work, and small group work, during their integrated social studies/ science lesson. In other classes, teachers and teaching assistants rotated among small groups of students, directing learning activities adjusted to the needs of the group. In these ways, teacher's classroom organization provides additional support for diverse learners.

QUESTION 4: Is the curriculum based on high academic standards?

- 1. The written curriculum at King Center Charter School is based on the New York State Core Curriculum in English Language Arts, mathematics, science and social studies, representing the basic proficiencies expected for all students. KCCS staff has aligned its internal assessments with the state proficiency levels, creating a measure that more clearly informs the school and parents of the achievement needs of the students.**

From its origin, the King Center Charter School curriculum was based on the New York State standards complemented with programs in the arts, music, physical education and language study. Partly in response to poor performance on state assessments in mathematics, the school recognized that its curriculum required clearer direction to support its generally young and inexperienced faculty. Over the summer of 2002 and continuing through the school year, the staff has been guided by several consultants to refine the curriculum into more concise tools listing overarching state standards and explicit descriptions of student performance tasks appropriate to each achievement level.

Curriculum development is further subdivided by individual grade level, rather than clustered as are the state core curriculum guidelines. At the time of the third year inspection, teachers had completed the second grade mathematics curriculum and the third and fourth grade documents were well under way. Progress in refining the primary grade program was less advanced.

In reading/English language arts, the school adopted a 'four blocks' model for literacy instruction to clarify and refine the general state frameworks. Classification of skills and knowledge typical of each level of proficiency are captured in a 'literacy portfolio' for reading, writing, and speaking/listening. The 'portfolio' is a physical folder in which teacher can collect and record student progress over time. The skills and content for each proficiency category are appropriate to the achievement levels and reflect expectations consistent with state standards.

2. Teachers are in the process of developing a common set of expectations of quality for students at each grade level, using the rubrics that were recently aligned with the state proficiency standards. In the brief visits to each class, the team noted variations among teachers in the rigor and challenge of the expectations for student demonstration of mastery.

While the written curriculum is being refined, King Center staff and leaders are undertaking an additional refinement of the assessment criteria used by teachers to gauge student performance levels. Partly in response to large differences between teachers' assessments of students' knowledge and skills as reflected in report card results and the performance of King Center students on the first state assessments, school leaders and consultants recognized a need to develop a more consistent understanding of student proficiency. Parents reported to the inspectors that, while their children's 'grades' appear lower than in past years, teachers' assessments appear to be more closely aligned with the expectations for children defined by the state. Parents expressed appreciation for this information, citing their desire to have their children educated to succeed in any setting, not just succeed when compared with others from troubled urban schools.

In operation, the school's curriculum expectations vary by teacher across the school. In large group sessions in several classes, teachers accepted an answer from one student, and didn't appear to check for comprehension across the whole group. Many times, students offered a less than accurate response, but were not probed to respond more fully or to correct their response to demonstrate their clearer understanding. In contrast, other teachers required students to repeat a response several times until acceptable. Several skillful teachers scanned across the group in large group sessions and called on students whom they seemed to expect might need reinforcement. To the observers, there appeared to be a range of expectations for the quality of student responses and student work demonstrations.

Similar variation was evident in student work products in notebooks and folders kept in classrooms. Some notebooks contained numerous daily exercises, while others held few. Some work included teacher comments, but many did not. The revised assessment system in development this year appears not to be fully in place in every classroom. Overall, classrooms at King Center Charter School varied by teacher in the level of expectations to which students are held.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

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

1. The four parents in the focus group expressed strong satisfaction with the work of the King Center Charter School.

The parents invited for the focus group expressed their appreciation for the alternative to parochial and district schools offered by the King Center Charter School. In particular, parents described how the school met their expectations for 'intimacy' and attention to the needs of individual students and the school's effort to treat each child as special. Enrichment programs such as the academic 'research groups,' as well as opportunities to learn violin or participate in music were seen as unusual but important enhancements to the urban education available in most schools. The participants in the focus group explained that the teachers at KCCS use 'different' approaches to teaching that encourage a desire for learning among their children. Each parent declared their child likes coming to school.

Parents expressed appreciation for the new grading system which aligns more closely with the expectations of the state assessments. While absolute 'grades' appear to have declined using the new rubrics, parents feel the reports more accurately inform their understanding of their child's performance strengths as well as performance gaps.

2. The five students in the focus group described their teachers and the 'interesting' work as key reasons for their satisfaction with the school.

Students' greatest praise was for their teachers, whom they felt 'cared' about them and were responsive to them ("they listen"). Among the most praised activities were violin lessons, the essay contest, being able to 'show off' at exhibitions, and learning 'stuff' in general. The comments from this small group were confirmed by the team in class visits, where there were few instances of disengaged students, and those who drifted off task were easily and promptly brought back to business.

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

1. Leadership and management of the King Center Charter Schools is structured and staffed to provide effective guidance for school operations.

King Center Charter School has only one designated 'administrator,' the Director, who has responsibility for overseeing instructional as well as management operations. Specific subtasks are delegated to support personnel, including student records, home coordinator, counseling, technology, research coordinator, and an informal teacher-mentor. The individuals responsible for each of these roles are skillful at their tasks and provide an important resource for the school. The manager of student records maintains information on applicants, enrollees, withdrawals, and completes essential reports for state and district agencies. The technology coordinator provides instruction for students in the computer

lab, but also monitors the electronic database that holds student grades and other assessment information. The school's focus on serving the whole family as a means of enhancing the child's educational success is facilitated by the coordinator of the Home Connection program. The coordinator makes frequent and friendly outreach to families of King Center children, identifying problem situations and helping families resolve challenges before they negatively impact the child's school performance. The counselor and research coordinator are responsible for the operation of the school's discipline response system, described in detail in the following section.

To assist with instructional supervision, the school's Director has invited a veteran staff member to serve as a coach/ facilitator for less skilled faculty members. This teacher serves as the de facto 'assistant director' to provide non-evaluative support to teachers. The team did not have sufficient time to explore the range of services provided by the mentor, but noted the Director's recognition that she could not provide all the instructional monitoring and mentoring her staff required without assistance.

2. The consistent application of the King Center Charter School's discipline system has fostered the development of a respectful, orderly school climate, through generalized use of consistent strategies as well as the focused use of intensive interventions.

A major professional development emphasis this year for King Center staff has been the strategies and framework of the Responsive Classroom program. Teachers throughout the school have implemented the strategies learned in the training last summer and in the fall for classroom management. The KCCS Director served as facilitator for the Responsive Classroom training, and continues ongoing support at weekly faculty meetings. Specialist teachers (Spanish, Physical Education, librarian) have adopted the Responsive Classroom methods, providing a clear and consistent set of expectations for students in all areas of the school.

The Home Connection coordinator is a key component of the Social Skills Research Project, coordinated by a research specialist at the school to provide intensive intervention for students with serious patterns of disruption. The research coordinator for the SSRP engages the families, students, faculty and staff in developing strategies to help the child learn the self control and self monitoring skills needed for school success. Students selected for SSRP have demonstrated significant difficulty in socialization, and participate in one-on-one meetings with the counselor as well as in family meetings with the staff. Teachers and parents are invited to use common behavior modification strategies with the students, reinforcing common expectations. A number of students have 'graduated' from the intensive program, as more have been enlisted. Reports of improved behavior on standardized questionnaires show the program is having a positive impact. Posters in classrooms indicate that the strategies used for intensive intervention are being adapted and adopted for general use. A program in violence prevention is currently targeted at third graders, and it involves the counselor meeting weekly with small groups of students to engage in conversation, simulation, and problem solving around topics of alternatives to violent responses in difficult situations.

3. Governance of the King Center Charter School is competent and committed, led by a Board that maintains an appropriate distinction between policy setting and management.

The King Center Charter School Board of Directors represents a stable and energetic collection of dedicated individuals with strong connections to the community. Several KCCS Board members also serve as members of the King Urban Life Center Board, strengthening the connection between the school and its sponsor agency. Several members of the KCCS Board have educational experience, balanced by several members with business and social service backgrounds. The range of experience offers sufficient diversity to provide effective guidance as school policies are considered. The educators on the Board are well versed in many aspects of educational reform and describe the school as a potential ‘demonstration’ of exemplary practices.

The Board offers high praise for the Director as the primary leader of the school’s operations and affords her generous latitude in making day to day decisions. At present, evaluation of the Director’s performance is informal, with Board members declaring they have full confidence in their familiarity with the quality of the tasks she performs.

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

1. School documents, comments from personnel, and descriptions of school efforts indicate a pervasive climate of continuous learning and improvement at King Center Charter School. The school’s responsiveness to the weak student performance results in the first two years reinforces the team’s judgment that the school has invested time, energy and resources in improving the school’s programs .

King Center has systems in place for short term review of the quality of the academic program, as well as systems and strategies for reviewing progress over the longer term.

In the short term, weekly faculty meetings serve as a vehicle for discussion of curriculum successes and problems. A primary agenda item each week is, “What worked, what didn’t?” Teachers meet informally after student dismissal to discuss areas of concern, both student and curriculum related. Board members commented that the Director enforces (gently!) a “no excuses” rule, forbidding staff members from blaming students, their families, or poverty for poor academic performance. Faculty members were enthusiastic in their discussion of progress toward aligning internal assessments with state standards, including identifying exemplars or anchor papers that display the criteria for each proficiency level.

Over the long term, the school has enlisted the assistance of several academic consultants to help with an analysis of test results and the identification of likely causes for poor performance. The consultants defined the alignment task as an important one, and provided feedback on the first mathematics curriculum document completed for second grade by a KCCS staff member. Other consultants are providing guidance for science curriculum specifications, with more specific standards than those included in the core

curriculum distributed by the state. Decisions about school-wide professional development in content areas derive from the identified areas of weakness in student performance results.

Beginning last year, the Director began meeting with individual teachers to review the performance of students in their class. The review was retrospective, given the time delay in return of state and standardized assessment results, but informative for both teachers and the Director. In reference to the test analysis and to the curriculum alignment project, teachers commented to the inspectors, "It's never been this clear what my responsibilities are. Now I know exactly what I need to teach." The clarity and pervasiveness of these admissions lends confidence that the school has embraced the ideal stated by the Director, "We're all learning here."

In response to last year's dismal student performance, the school modified its literacy program, adopting the "Four Blocks" model, which includes a blend of phonics, fluency, comprehension and decoding skills. The school captured the elements of the four blocks model in a detailed rubric aligned along a continuum classified from pre-reader to experienced reader. The continuum is printed on a 'literacy portfolio' along with a continuum/ rubric for writing and one for listening/ speaking. Teachers collect student work and identify their location on the continuum each reporting period, sharing the portfolio with parents at conferences. Parents praised the portfolio for its detail and accuracy in pinpointing strengths and needs for each child. Parents felt they were helped in learning where they can provide support for their child by reading the indicators on the portfolio scale. Teachers report that the portfolio helps them know where individual students need direction.

A second response to last year's results was the alignment of the mathematics curriculum to the state frameworks at each grade level. This process is underway, with the second grade curriculum completed, and third and fourth grade documents progressing well. Teachers meet to sort the essential skills listed in the state curriculum for grades up to four and align their math activities with the grade-specific expectations. One teacher went a step further and designed a local diagnostic/predictive test for her students that used items reflecting all four proficiency levels similar to state assessments.

Previous accountability reports on the King Center Charter School have remarked on the school's need for increased focus on strategies to accelerate student's academic achievement. Based on the inspection visit observations and interviews, the team judged that the systematic and orderly approach the school now has in place to analyze student academic performance results is and will likely be an important factor in guiding realistic and effective improvement efforts. Particularly compelling were teachers' comments that they now know their specific responsibilities for helping students achieve proficiency of clearly defined content and skills.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

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

- 1. Common themes consistent with the school's written mission were repeated by each group of stakeholders interviewed by the Inspection team: a focus on individual development, offering a different education for urban students, and the development of social skills to support children's future success.**

Parents, teachers and Board members all mentioned attention to individual student needs as a distinctive characteristic of the King Center Charter School. For parents, the individual attention comes in the form of small classes and an intimate school environment, in contrast to the conditions in both district and parochial schools in the community. For teachers, a focus on individual attention directs their efforts to devise lesson activities that allow for different interests and offers supports for struggling students or enrichment for accelerated children. Board members considered the primary purpose of establishing the school to provide a 'viable alternative' to traditional schools by creating a small, intimate environment for the children of the community.

A second theme prevalent among King Center stakeholders refers to the school's attention to developing social skills among students to enable their success in the wider community. Parents and Board members spoke approvingly of the need to provide children with skills commonly expected in traditional settings, along with providing essential academic skills. Parents praised the behavioral expectations for their children. Both parents and Board members spoke with high regard for the Social Skills Research Project which provides intensive intervention for difficult youngsters, and the adaptation of some of the intensive strategies for use across the school.

A founding inspiration for the establishment of the King Center Charter School is a belief that helping families is an essential part of fostering student academic success: "You can't help children without helping families" declared one Board member. Teachers and Board members spoke frequently about the role of families and caregivers in the academic success of the children at King Center. They cited the Home Connection program as a critical school component for providing support outside the school for the child and his/her caregivers.

The mission and vision of the King Center Charter School is commonly understood and receives the vocal and financial support from the school's stakeholders to bring the mission and vision to life through structured programs at the school.

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

- 1. The school's special programs are making strong progress toward their targets, namely, the Home Connection, Social Skills Research Study, and technology in support of education.**

In its mission, KCCS promised a "commitment to meaningful parent involvement" and has implemented the Home Connection to achieve this goal. The Home Connection

coordinator makes frequent contact with children's homes and with their caregivers to offer support and provide assistance in promoting children's academic success. For example, the Home Connection coordinator has provided health referrals, legal contacts, and help with job related concerns. In the majority of cases, contact with the Home Connection staff member involves a conversation with parents to guide them in providing a structure for good homework habits for their children.

The Social Skills Research Study is the vehicle through which KCCS embodies its goal of providing for the development of social skills among its students along with its commitment to academic skills. As described earlier, the SSRS combines the services of the counselor and research assistant to develop intensive interventions with specified students in the school population. According to assessment results, students targeted for intervention are demonstrating improved behavior both in school and at home. Parents and teachers are instructed in a variety of intervention strategies. Reinforcement of expectations for student behavior at both home and school is credited with an important portion of the program's success. At present, the school has not yet conducted a formal quantitative correlation between the behavioral interventions and academic performance, but anecdotal reports suggest the impact is measurable. Clear presentation of the influence of SSRS on academic achievement would confirm the school's anecdotal reports.

The KCCS mission promises “. . . individualized, technology rich learning experiences.” Students at KCCS in all grades have designated technology instruction in the computer lab, with the younger students learning to use drill and practice instructional games while improving their keyboarding skills. The engrossed faces and disappointed groans at dismissal hint at their engagement with the lessons. Upper grade students use the computers in their classes and in the library as research and writing tools.

Through a major grant from Verizon, each classroom at KCCS is equipped with cameras, microphones and a monitor, controlled from a central 'distance learning' lab. Observers can 'visit' classes at the school without distracting the students. The system has been used in conjunction with the SSRS to monitor student behavior and to provide clinical observation without interfering or spotlighting a particular individual. Similarly, the system has been used with preservice teacher programs at local colleges to provide class observation experiences for groups of student teachers without disrupting the learning environment for KCCS students. This program meets the promise of the KCCS charter to promote “educational research supported through a distance technology link to area colleges and universities.” The Inspection team did not have an opportunity to corroborate all aspects of these programs, but the program is described in detail in a variety of school documents.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN – ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS

Goal 1: “All students at the King Center Charter School will make strong progress towards reading proficiency.”

measure 1: each cohort will increase 3 percentiles per year on the Woodcock Johnson Reading Test.

measure 2: 75% of students at KCCS for 3 years or more will achieve level 3 or 4 on NYS ELA assessment.

measure 3: students at KCCS for two or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools from Buffalo school district.

Goal 2: “All students at the King Center Charter School will make strong progress toward math proficiency.”

measure 1: each cohort increase 3 percentiles per year on Woodcock Johnson math test.

measure 2: 75% students at KCCS for 3 or more years will achieve level 3 or 4 on NYS ELA assessment.

measure 3: students at KCCS for two or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools from Buffalo school district.

Goal 3: “All students at the King Center Charter School will demonstrate steady progress in understanding and application of science concepts.”

measure 1: 75% of students at KCCS 3 or more years will score at level 3 or 4 on NYS Science assessments.

measure 2: students at KCCS for 2 or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools in Buffalo on NYS Science assessments.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

1. Clarify tables of results by inserting a column for state performance levels and numbers of students at each category (n) as well as percent achieving each proficiency level.
2. In addition to whole class results, consider reporting the progress of individual students over time, especially if the class population is small.
3. Indicate on charts and tables whether the results are being reported for whole class groups or for true cohorts. CSI Accountability Plan Guidelines require schools to report true cohorts/continuing students to identify the school’s influence on attainment.

4. While there is no data yet for measure 3, results from ‘similar’ Buffalo schools (or the Buffalo City District) can be obtained from the state web site. KCCS could report the target it intends to meet by presenting the BCS results in its progress report, and sharing that target with teachers and parents as a preview of the results KCCS will need to meet the standard set in measure 3.
5. In addition to the measures defined in the approved KCCS Accountability Plan, the school might consider describing the development of its rubric system recently completed and implemented this year. Descriptions of the reasons for development of the math rubric, its alignment with state proficiency standards, and the impact of its use would provide evaluators with insight into the school’s ability to monitor and revise its academic program to better meet student needs.
6. Two other additional pieces of information to consider adding as addenda to the 2003 Accountability Progress Report are (1) a description and samples of the use of the literacy portfolio and its embedded scope and sequence tracking charts and (2) discussion of the development and use of electronic portfolios. Both systems hold promise for exemplary practices that offer supporting evidence of the school’s ability to record student progress in both qualitative and quantitative ways.
7. The revised report cards could serve as an additional internal measure for reporting changes in student attainment. If summarized by grade level and by reporting period, and/ or by reporting individual progress over time, the data could be correlated with other assessments to show consistency between teachers’ grading criteria and those of state or nationally normed tests.

For Goal 2 (mathematics)

8. If including a “Plan of Action” in the Accountability Progress Report, describe in more detail how the mathematics consultant will work with teachers, especially frequency, content, skills to be addressed. This provides the reader with a better understanding of the needs the school has identified for the improvement of its staff.

For Goal 3 (science)

9. As indicated above for reading and mathematics, to be clearer tables should include (a) columns showing proficiency levels; (b) identifying headers showing whether cohort (continuing) or whole class results; (c) comparison with Buffalo City Schools results.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS

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

Goal 1: “The King Center Charter School will maintain steady enrollment and attendance.”

measure 1: maintain enrollment at 90% capacity with a wait list greater than 15% of population.

measure 2: average daily attendance greater than or equal to 90%.

Goal 2: “The King Center Charter School will make sound decisions to ensure responsible use of financial resources to maximize student learning.”

measure 1: effective allocation of resources

ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

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

For Goal 1:

1. If available, it would provide a clearer context if the Accountability Progress Report indicated the enrollment by grade level for all the years of operation of KCCS. If waiting list information has been retained, this adds complementary support to the assertion that the school is well received by the community.
2. Consider collecting and classifying reasons for withdrawal from parents/ caregivers when children leave King Center. Report the range of reasons in your Progress Report and discuss how the reasons reflect on the school’s ability to provide ‘customer’ satisfaction.
3. King Center already exceeds its target of 90% attendance. Consider raising the target over time.
4. In addition to the measures listed in the approved Accountability Plan, the school might want to add information about the district’s mobility/ transiency rate among students to show evaluators the contrast between the stability of the King Center population and the Buffalo City schools.
5. King Center staff and Board members described a number of programs to educate parents not only as educational partners but also as advocates within their community for the school. The school’s efforts to foster and maintain family support could make an informative addition to the Progress Report.

For Goal 2 (use of financial resources)

6. While the phrase “effective allocation of resources” has meaning in a financial sense, it might be worthwhile for the school to define for itself what constitutes ‘effective’ allocation – whether a minimum percentage of resources allocated to instruction uses, or a maximum percentage allocated to management. If there is consensus among Board and school leaders on the quantitative meaning of ‘effective allocation,’ it would be helpful to share that definition in the progress report.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS

Goal 1: “All children will behave in a socially acceptable manner.”

measure 1: ‘selected children’ will show 20% improvement on a social skills rating system

measure 2: ‘selected children’ will show a 20% decrease on the Problem Behavior Subscale

Goal 2: “Parents will become active partners in their child’s educational program”

measure 1: 80% parents will sign off on 90% of children’s homework.

measure 2: 70% of parents will participate in each of 3 parent teacher conferences
20% of parents will volunteer 3 hours each month.

UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

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

For Goal 1:

1. Condense the discussion of SSRS to pertinent core facts, namely how many students, what services/ activities included, personnel allocated, impact across the larger school population. If samples of narrative reports are deemed helpful, include as addenda. Most importantly, clearly link the SSRS to the school’s mission of promoting civic responsibility.
2. The inspectors learned about extensive follow-up and monitoring conducted by members of the SSRS team. Readers of the Accountability Progress Report would find it informative to read summaries of the number of home visits, the phone calls, results of weekly meetings and the systems in place to review weekly data reports from teachers and parents.
3. If Responsive Classroom is to continue to be a focus, include a bit more detail on its strategies and impact on the school’s climate, particularly for evaluators who may not be familiar with its specific elements.
4. Likewise, describe how “Second Steps,” mentioned in your 2002 Progress Report Action Plan, has been used in classrooms and how staff members or school leaders assess its impact.

For Goal 2 (parents as active partners)

5. Report the exact measure as indicated in the plan. For example, the measure calls for parents to “sign off” on homework. Explain how these ‘sign offs’ are collected and summarized for the report. (Many schools would like to read about effective methods of tracking homework completion.)
6. The chart reporting parent involvement is clear and descriptive.
7. Consider explaining the choice of a target of 70% of parents participating. To the inspectors, it appears you will exceed this target and it is clear King Center parents could reach a higher participation rate.
8. It is often informative to know the kinds of tasks parent volunteers perform at the school – whether duplicating or tutoring or monitoring lunch rooms. Consider including a brief description of the types of tasks your volunteers perform for the school.

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 needs of diverse students?	Class visits, interviews, data review, Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Do the school's standards reflect implementation of high academic expectations?	Review of curriculum documents; confirmation of implementation by class visits
Organizational Viability	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey review
	Are systems in place to promote the efficient operation of school functions?	Interviews, observations Staffing history
	Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify as needed?	Personnel evaluation policies, minutes and agendas of board, staff meetings
Unique Aspects	Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?	Interviews, document reviews
	Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?	Accountability Plan, Progress Reports, other docs unique to each school
Financial Accountability	Is enrollment stable and sufficient to provide the financial foundation of the school?	
	Does the school's financial management serve the needs of students?	
Legal Compliance	Is the school in essential compliance with legal and regulatory requirements?	

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

**APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR
KING CENTER CHARTER SCHOOL**

I. Academic Program

Goal 1: All students at the King Center Charter School will make strong progress towards reading proficiency.	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
-- each cohort will increase 3 percentiles per year on the Woodcock Johnson Reading Test	-- clarify tables by inserting performance levels, numbers of students (n) at each category -- report progress of individual students over time, as well as the progress of cohorts and the performance of whole classes
-- 75% of students at KCCS for 3 years or more will achieve level 3 or 4 on NYS ELA assessment	-- report progress of true cohorts for each test
-- students at KCCS for 2 or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools from Buffalo school district	-- discuss selection of similar schools with CSI as soon as possible; identify the performance levels of the similar schools and consider probable comparison
in addition to these measures ---	-- describe the development of the rubric system for mathematics, including how and why it was developed (e.g. aligned with the NYS standards) -- describe the literacy portfolio / scope and sequence tracking charts (show samples) -- describe the electronic portfolio, how it is used to track progress, how used by teachers and parents -- include internal assessment (report card summaries) as addenda
Goal 2: All students at the King Center Charter School will make strong progress toward math proficiency.	
-- each cohort increase 3 percentiles per year on Woodcock Johnson math test	-- if including a 'plan of action' be explicit in how consultant worked with teachers, how identified teacher needs and selected strategies to work with teachers
-- 75% students at KCCS for 3 or more years will achieve level 3 or 4 on NYS ELA assessment	-- report true cohorts and/ or individual progress as well as the performance of the whole class
-- students at KCCS for two or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools from Buffalo school district	-- (see note under 'reading')
Goal 3: All students at the King Center Charter School will demonstrate steady progress in understanding and application of science concepts	
-- 75% of students at KCCS 3 or more years will score at level 3 or 4 on NYS Science assessments	-- clarify tables showing proficiency levels -- discuss plan of action to address low performance, and means of monitoring success of any new strategies

-- students at KCCS for 2 or more years will exceed the performance of similar schools in Buffalo on NYS Science assessments	-- show proficiency levels along with raw scores on NYS Science assessment
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II. Organizational Viability

Goal 1: The King Center Charter School will maintain steady enrollment and attendance.	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
-- maintain enrollment at 90% capacity with a wait list greater than 15% of population	-- include a table to show enrollment over years of operation as well as waiting list by grade (if available) -- indicate withdrawals from school and reasons why
-- average daily attendance greater than or equal to 90%	-- consider raising target above 90% (state minimum)
in addition to the planned measures:	-- discuss if possible rates of transiency/ mobility in district schools to show KCCS' stability -- describe KCCS efforts to educate parents to develop an understanding of the school and to recruit parent support and advocacy for the organization
Goal 2: The King Center Charter School will make sound decisions to ensure responsible use of financial resources to maximize student learning.	
-- effective allocation of resources	-- describe for a reader "effective" use of resources (e.g. list classes of expenses and percent allocated to each class, (e.g., professional development, transportation, salaries, student support services)

III. Unique Areas

Goal 1: All children will behave in a socially acceptable manner.	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
-- 'selected children' will show 20% improvement on a social skills rating system	-- condense discussion of SSRS to pertinent core facts, -- describe how SSRS impacts larger population; -- place within context of school's mission of civic responsibility -- add explanation of the follow-up and monitoring steps in the research study (number of home visits, phone calls, weekly meetings and review of weekly report data)
in addition	-- describe use of Responsive Classroom in school and its impact on climate of the school, recognition of gaps in RC -- describe use of Second Steps in classrooms
-- 'selected children' will show a 20% decrease on the Problem Behavior Subscale	(see discussion under measure 1)
Goal 2: Parents will become active partners in their child's educational program.	
-- 80% parents will sign off on 90% of children's homework	-- reply to exact measure listed (e.g., 'sign off' sheets or records; perhaps include a sample 'log')
-- 70% of parents will participate in each of 3 parent teacher conferences	-- provide a clear chart to display the information by grade/ date -- consider raising target if reasonable
-- 20% of parents will volunteer 3 hours each month	-- describe in more detail kinds of tasks parents performed for the school as volunteers

