



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2011-2012

Visit Date: February 15-16, 2012

Report Issued: August 7, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report includes four components. The first section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. The second section provides background information on the conduct of the evaluation visit, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school's current charter cycle. The third section provides the school's 2010-11 Performance Review and Summaries, which gives an analysis of the attainment of the key academic goals in the school's Accountability Plan. Finally, a fourth section entitled School Evaluation Visit presents overall benchmark conclusions (in italics) based on the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (a component of the Renewal Benchmarks) and an analysis of evidence collected for each of the respective benchmarks. Following these sections, the report includes an appendix containing the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks used during the visit.

The Qualitative Educational Benchmarks address the academic success of the school, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization, including board oversight and organizational capacity. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

The report below provides more detailed conclusions, and evidence to support these conclusions, for some benchmarks in order to highlight areas of concern and provide additional feedback. In contrast to the format of reports issued in previous years and in an effort to issue reports in a timelier manner, the Institute now approaches the presentation as an exception report and deliberately emphasizes areas of concern. As such, limited detail and evidence about positive aspects of the program are not an indication that the Institute does not fully recognize evidence of program effectiveness.

Because of the inherent complexity of a school organization, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a single rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. However, it does summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	January 1, 2000
Date Initial Charter Approved by Board of Regents	May 4, 2000
School Opening Date	September, 2000

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2000-01	132-14 Bennet Court Jamaica, NY	All	NYC CSD 29
2001-02 – Present	207-01 Jamaica Avenue Queens Village, NY	All	NYC CSD 29

Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	Victory Education Partners	Educational Management Organization	2000-present

Renewal

Type of Renewal	Date
Initial Full-Term Renewal	March 1, 2005
Subsequent Full-Term Renewal	March 16, 2010

Current Mission Statement

The mission of the Merrick Academy – Queens Public Charter School is to create one of the finest public schools in America through use of the charter school process; to serve the “at risk” children of Springfield Gardens and Jamaica, Queens; and to create a role model for charter public school design that can be replicated in disadvantaged neighborhoods everywhere.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to students, parents and the Southeast Queens community to provide an academic program that will prepare students to meet and exceed New York State performance standards;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a curriculum in English language arts and mathematics that includes scientifically-based research to support its success;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of data to inform instruction and in providing differentiated instruction to support individual student needs;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established learning community where teachers use student work, research and best practices to improve student performance;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive professional development program;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a summer homework program to address any regression in learning;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one hour and thirty minutes of ELA instruction daily based on balanced literacy, including a readers’ and writer’s workshop, as modeled by the National Writing Project and Great Source Writing Program;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one hour and thirty minutes of daily mathematics instruction, using Everyday Mathematics, enrichment and experiential learning; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive assessment system.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2000-01	350	125	121	K-2	K-2	180
2001-02	450	175	169	K-4	K-3	180
2002-03	550	350	348	K-6	K-4	180
2003-04	650	400	400	K-8	K-5	180
2004-05	750	450	448	K-10	K-6	180
2005-06	475	500	500	K-5	K-6	180
2006-07	500	525	461	K-5	K-6	182
2007-08	500	525	495	K-5	K-6	182
2008-09	500	525	500	K-5	K-6	180
2009-10	525	-	494	K-5	K-6	180
2010-11	540	-	492	K-6	K-6	180
2011-12	540	-	469	K-6	K-6	180

Student Demographics²

	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 29 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 29 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 29 Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	1	0	1	0	1
Black or African American	95	71	95	71	94	70
Hispanic	2	13	2	13	3	13
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	2	13	1	14	3	14
White	0	2	1	2	0	2
Multiracial	1	0	0	0	0	0
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities ³	7	N/A	7	N/A	7	N/A
English Language Learners	0	7	0	7	0	8
Free/Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	37	65	48	64	48	66
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	14	11	17	10	12	9

¹ Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

² New York State Report Cards.

³ New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is self-reported.

Current Board of Trustees⁴

Board Member Name	Position/Committees
Gerald Karikari	Chairman
Gregory Hansen	Human Resources and Operations Committees
Traci Powell	Academic, Negotiation, Human Resources, Operations, and Finance Committees
Tanya Johnson	Academic Committee
Valerie Williams	Human Resources and Academic Committees

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
September 2000-February 2010	Alma Alston, Principal
March 2010 - August 2010	Carolyn Thomas, Interim Acting Principal
September 2010 - November 2010	Melissa Muhammed, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development
January 2011 - December 2011	Roberta Cummings-Smith, Director of Strategic Planning and Staff Development
December 2011-Present	Raquel Pottinger-Bird, Principal/ Director of Curriculum and Instruction

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2000-01	First-Year Visit	Institute	May 22, 2001
2001-02	Annual Visit	Institute	May 13, 2002
2002-03	Annual Visit	External (SchoolWorks)	January 15-16, 2003
2004-05	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	September, 2004
2006-07	Subsequent Visit	Institute	May 24, 2007
2007-08	Subsequent Visit	External (SchoolWorks)	May 13-14, 2008
2009-10	Subsequent Renewal Visit	Institute	November 6, 2009
2011-12	Subsequent Visit	Institute	February 15-16, 2012

⁴ Source: Application for Renewal.

CONDUCT OF VISIT

Specifications

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
February 15-16, 2012	Danielle Keen	Analyst for School Evaluation
	Adam Aberman	External Consultant
	Renee DeVore	External Consultant

Context of the Visit

Charter Cycle ⁵	
Charter Period	2 nd Year of Third Charter Term
Accountability Period	3 rd Year of Five-Year Accountability Period
Impending Renewal Visit	Fall 2014

⁵ Because the Institute makes a renewal decision in the last year of a Charter Period, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the Charter Period. For initial renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the Charter Period. For subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous Charter Period through the next to last year of the current Charter Period.

2010-11 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Performance Summary

In 2010-11, the second year of Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School's five-year Accountability Period, the school did not meet both its mathematics and English language arts goals due to a decline in performance. These results are inconsistent with the prior two years, including the last year of the prior Accountability Period, when the school met the overall goal in both subjects. The school is meeting its science and NCLB goals.

English Language Arts

Based on results of the five measures in its Accountability Plan, Merrick has not met its English language arts goal continuing its decline in each of the measures from the previous year. The school met the absolute target with 76 percent of students achieving proficiency. This outcome was about the same as the previous year, but was a notable decline from the last year of the prior Accountability Period. The school has consistently exceeded the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state and performed only slightly better than the local community school district, a decline from 2009-10. In comparison to demographically similar schools, Merrick did not meet the target, but more importantly performed worse than expected in comparison to the prior year where at least it performed better than predicted. The school has not met its cohort growth target throughout the Accountability Period, with the school showing an overall year-to-year decline among the cohorts in both years.

Mathematics

Based on the results of the five measures in its Accountability Plan, Merrick has not met its Accountability Plan goal in mathematics continuing its decline in each of the measures from the previous year. In 2010-11, the school met its target with 89 percent of students achieving proficiency. The school performed better than the state's AMO and the local community school district. In comparison to demographically similar schools, Merrick did not meet its target, showing a steep decline from previous years and performing worse than expected. Merrick did not meet its year-to-year growth target in 2010-11 and the overall results showed a decline.

Science

Merrick met its science goal in the second year of the current Accountability Period. Eighty-five percent of students achieved proficiency in 2010-11, surpassing the absolute target of 75 percent proficiency. While the school outperformed the local community school district in 2009-10, comparison data for the more recent year are yet unavailable.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School



	2008-09 Grades Served: K-6				2009-10 Grades Served: K-6				2010-11 Grades Served: K-6								
	All Students % (N)		2+ Years Students % (N)		All Students % (N)		2+ Years Students % (N)		All Students % (N)		2+ Years Students % (N)						
	Grades	% (N)	Grades	% (N)	Grades	% (N)	Grades	% (N)	Grades	% (N)	Grades	% (N)					
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above a Level 3 on the New York State exam. (\$) 2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system. (\$) COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district. 4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at or above Level 3 on the state exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate. GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 75 percent performing at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam. An asterisk indicates cohort met target. (\$) 6. Each year the school will exceed its predicted percent of students at or above Level 3 on the state exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate.	3	89.4 (76)	91.2 (68)	77.3 (75)	76.5 (68)	46.8 (77)	64.1 (41)	3	46.8 (77)	64.1 (41)	4	52.1 (73)	82.4 (56)				
	4	85.9 (78)	84.3 (70)	80.5 (77)	82.6 (69)	52.1 (73)	82.4 (56)	5	43.9 (66)	74.6 (44)	6	47.8 (46)	84.8 (39)				
	5	88.0 (50)	87.5 (48)	83.1 (71)	81.2 (69)	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)			
	6	89.5 (57)	88.7 (53)	76.9 (39)	76.9 (39)	All	79.8 (262)	79.6 (245)	All	52.6 (262)	75.9 (180)	YES	YES				
	7	(0)	(0)	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO		
	8	(0)	(0)	3-6	188	144	3-6	179	155	3-6	138	122	3-6	138	122		
	All	88.1 (261)	87.9 (239)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES			
	Comparison: Queens District 29	Grades		School	District	Comparison: Queens District 29		Grades		School	District	Comparison: Queens District 29		Grades		School	District
	3-6	87.9	71.7	3-6	87.9	71.7	3-6	53.1	40.7	3-6	48.5	45.5	3-6	48.5	45.5		
% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		
36.7	88.1	80.1	0.85	47.6	53.6	51.8	0.16	48.2	52.6	53.0	-0.37	48.2	52.6	53.0	-0.37		
Gr N	Base	Target	Result	Gr N	Base	Target	Result	Gr N	Base	Target	Result	Gr N	Base	Target	Result		
4	70	82.9	83.0	84.3 *	4	70	91.4	91.5	82.9	4	69	66.7	70.8	49.3			
5	49	69.4	72.2	87.8 *	5	71	87.3	87.4	83.1	5	66	47.0	61.0	43.9			
6	55	70.9	73.0	89.1 *	6	39	84.6	84.7	76.9	6	46	52.2	63.6	47.8			
7					7					7							
8					8					8							
All	175	74.9	86.9	All	181	87.8	81.2	All	182	55.5	47.3						

(S) SED's "time adjusted cut scores" are used in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 results for #1 and in the 2009-10 results for #2 and #5. SED's publicly reported cut scores are used for the other results. Data Sources: New York State data; school-submitted workbooks; and the Institute's student performance database.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School



	2008-09 Grades Served: K-6			2009-10 Grades Served: K-6			2010-11 Grades Served: K-6			MET
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	
		3	98.7 (76)	98.5 (68)	3	97.3 (75)	97.1 (68)	3	98.7 (77)	
	4	96.1 (78)	95.7 (70)	4	88.3 (77)	87.0 (69)	4	86.5 (74)	85.5 (69)	
	5	98.0 (50)	97.9 (48)	5	92.9 (70)	92.7 (68)	5	91.2 (68)	90.2 (61)	
	6	100.0 (57)	100.0 (53)	6	97.4 (39)	97.4 (39)	6	80.9 (47)	80.9 (47)	
	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)	
	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	
	All	98.1 (261)	97.9 (239)	All	93.5 (261)	93.0 (244)	All	90.2 (266)	89.2 (241)	
	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	
	3-6	198	119	3-6	193	135	3-6	152	137	
	Comparison: Queens District 29			Comparison: Queens District 29			Comparison: Queens District 29			
	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	
	3-6	97.9	82.8	3-6	69.7	46.9	3-6	58.1	51.4	
	% FL	Actual	Predicted	% FL	Actual	Predicted	% FL	Actual	Predicted	
	36.7	98.1	89.1	47.6	69.0	59.6	48.2	57.1	61.6	
	Effect Size	1.16	YES	Effect Size	0.61	YES	Effect Size	-0.26	NO	
	Gr	N	Base	Gr	N	Base	Gr	N	Base	
	3	1	0.0	3	1	100.0	3	1	100.0	
	4	69	98.6	4	70	100.0	4	70	72.9	
	5	49	81.6	5	70	97.1	5	68	66.2	
	6	57	73.7	6	39	97.4	6	46	65.2	
	7			7			7			
	8			8			8			
	All	176	85.2	All	180	98.3	All	185	68.1	
			97.7			91.7			59.5	
	Target	Result	NO	Target	Result	NO	Target	Result	NO	
	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0		73.9	68.6		
	95.7	95.7		87.1	87.1		70.6	55.9		
	98.0 *	98.0 *		92.9	92.9		70.1	50.0		
	100.0 *	100.0 *		97.4	97.4					

ABSOLUTE MEASURES

- Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above a Level 3 on the New York State exam.(§)

- Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.(§)

COMPARATIVE MEASURES

- Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.

- Each year the school will exceed its predicted level of students at or above Level 3 on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate.

GROWTH MEASURE

- Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 75 percent performing at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam. An asterisk indicates cohort met target.(§)

(§) SED's "time adjusted cut scores" are used in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 results for #1 and in the 2009-10 results for #2 and #5. SED's publicly reported cut scores are used for the other results. Data Sources: New York State data; school-submitted workbooks; and the Institute's student performance database.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence

1. B Use of Assessment

Merrick Academy-Queens Public Charter School (“Merrick”) gathers assessment and evaluation data; however, the school provides limited oversight to teachers in using data to improve classroom instruction.

The school regularly administers both standardized and informal assessments, including the Aquity, DIBELS, Terra Nova, Fountas & Pinnell and New York State assessments, as well as unit tests, quizzes and exit slips. The school systematically collects and analyzes data from standardized assessments and makes it accessible to teachers; however, in its twelfth year, the school does not have a school-wide process in place for teachers to use the data to improve instruction. The effectiveness of Merrick’s assessment program depends heavily on the expertise of teachers in independently analyzing assessment results; the school and its education management company, Victory Education Partners, provide teachers with only limited professional development in doing so. Teachers analyze standardized assessment data on their own or informally with their grade teams and adjust instruction as they see fit. Teachers work together in grade teams in order to grade teacher-created assessments and writing assignments; however, this practice stems from a teacher-driven desire to seek informal grading feedback from their peers rather than a systematic protocol designed to improve the reliability of assessment data. At the time of the visit, in her third month as school leader, the school’s new director of curriculum and instruction had not yet begun to use assessment data systematically to evaluate the school’s overall academic program nor was there a common understanding among the teachers of her expectations with regard to student achievement on assessments.

1. C Curriculum

Teachers at Merrick use its commercial curriculum to prepare students to meet New York State standards with little oversight from instructional leaders.

Teachers at Merrick have access to commercially created curricular documents, aligned to the New York State standards, such as scope and sequence documents and pacing charts; however, teachers continue to use these curriculum documents inconsistently. Each grade team modifies its own grade’s scope and sequence and plans lessons in isolation. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive and consistent between classes at each grade level, with teachers implementing uniform lessons in each grade; however, there is no process in place to ensure vertical alignment between grades. Grade teams, at their own initiative, analyze units before teaching them, make adjustments and add supplemental materials where they feel that elements are lacking. Grade teams develop lessons by committee, with designated teachers creating lesson plans for the entire grade in one subject and distributing the plans to colleagues. School leaders do not review lesson plans of grade teams regularly and systematically.

1. D Pedagogy

Adequate instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school, with quality instruction

evident only in a small minority of classrooms.

Purposeful instruction is evident throughout the school, though many classes are not sufficiently rigorous to push students to acquire depth of understanding in presented material. Teachers at Merrick demonstrate general subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach and engage the majority of students in their instruction; nevertheless, a sizable group of students are off-task or opt out of learning. Classroom activities as planned, are purposeful, though lesson implementation does not display a sufficient level of rigor likely to prepare students to succeed on the New York State exam. For example, in one classroom a teacher had planned a rigorous lesson including many opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills; however, the teacher opted to omit several of these opportunities when faced with problems in lesson pacing. In another classroom, a teacher planned time for students to reinforce a skill taught the day before; however, instead of using this time to activate higher order thinking skills and push students beyond a basic understanding of the skill, the teacher repeated the same activity practiced the previous day.

Many teachers do not clearly communicate the objective of lessons or directions for the activity during lesson execution, leaving many students unable to articulate what they are supposed to do and why. Several teachers ask pertinent and challenging questions, and require students, even in the lower grades, to justify their answers; whereas, questioning techniques in most other classrooms are not strategic and yield less rich discussion. Only some teachers maximize learning time, with many taking an inordinate amount of time to transition students from one activity to another.

A recent focus on creating lessons with measureable learning objectives and focus questions has yielded results; clear, measurable objectives are evident in lesson plans, but they are often not articulated to students. Lesson plans and instruction generally align to the commercial scope and sequence outlined in the school's curriculum framework, as well as the New York State standards, and teachers use a common format for lesson planning.

1. E Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership at Merrick is inconsistent and uncoordinated.

With frequent leadership changes over the last several years, the leadership team has lacked coordination in supporting teacher development and improving instruction. Currently, Merrick's director of curriculum and instruction and the school's program manager serve as the instructional leaders at the school.

Most teachers are familiar with the leaders' expectations regarding teacher performance during formal and informal observations. Post-observation feedback is frequent; however, leaders spend the majority of their time in the upper-grades, only observing lower-grade teachers sporadically. Part-time consultants from Victory Education Partners also provide guidance in specific content areas and to grade level teams. Their support is in response to teacher requests rather than determined by identified teacher need.

While the director of curriculum and instruction, the program manager and several Victory consultants can clearly articulate the role they play in the school's instructional leadership strategy, teachers are unclear about who is their primary instructional leader and from whom they should seek help when necessary. Instructional leaders do not coordinate their classroom visits and observations and do not have a systematic process for sharing their perceptions with each other sometimes resulting in contradictory feedback.

Several different leaders have formally evaluated teachers at Merrick during this charter period. Teachers report that evaluation frequency and criteria has changed each year and that they are unsure what the new director of curriculum and instruction expects. At the time of the visit, the director of curriculum and instruction reported that she was planning to begin formal evaluations in the near future and would conduct three rounds of formal evaluations herself in order to set new and consistent expectations for teachers. Though the previous leader evaluated teachers at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year, the new leader plans to put forth only her own formal evaluations, but has reviewed the ones from earlier in the school year for informational purposes. Teachers could not comment on their understanding of the new evaluation criteria, as the leader had not yet evaluated them.

Teachers have the opportunity to work in grade level teams once a week for 90 minutes. In the absence of guidance from the building leaders on how to use common-planning time, this time is usually unstructured and left to the discretion of the teams. The school provides no scheduled time for teachers to meet across grade levels in order to ensure vertical alignment of curriculum and instruction.

1. F At-Risk Students

Merrick has a system for helping students who are struggling academically; however, the school does not have a program for serving English Language Learners (ELLs).

Merrick deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the needs of students at risk of academic failure. Using Victory's Response to Intervention (RTI) model, the school provides Academic Intervention Services (AIS), Title I Services and special education services. The school has a clearly defined procedure for identifying at-risk students, based on assessment results. The school employs two full-time AIS teachers who provide push-in support to students less than six months below grade level in mathematics and English language arts, as well as two Title I teachers who provide push-in and pull-out services to students more than six months behind. Teachers who are concerned about a new student that may need intervention or a student who is failing to progress can refer the student to the Peer-Pupil Committee (PPC). This committee, comprised of teachers, learning specialists and other instructional leaders, meets regularly to suggest interventions and changes to the student's AIS or Title I services or to submit students to special education referral.

Teachers measure the progress of at-risk students once per month using the easyCBM proprietary assessment program, which provides at-risk and special education teachers with an item-analysis in reading and math that assists for planning small group instruction. General education teachers also regularly complete written forms to notify at-risk and special education teachers of which skills they observe students struggling. General education teachers report that they receive limited professional development on how to support struggling students and that they have limited

informal communication with the at-risk staff outside of the written forms.

The school does not have a program to support ELLs, despite enrolling five ELLs. The school screens incoming students using the Home Language Survey and the LAB-R. Students who qualify receive Title I pull-out services five times per week. Although a Title I teacher reports receiving some professional development on working with ELLs and using phonics-based interventions targeted toward language development, the activity is not a program that will likely result in effective language acquisition.

1. G Student Order and Discipline

The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship, though some teachers tolerate low-level misbehavior.

The school is generally safe and orderly. It has a common school-wide discipline practice of using color-coded designations of student behavior to delineate infractions. While each class has the color-coded system, teachers implement it inconsistently: students in some classrooms respond quickly and uniformly when teachers ask them to exhibit “green behavior;” in others, teachers ignore the color codes and tolerate low-level misbehavior. While there are multiple adults present in many classrooms, especially in the lower-grades, the supporting teachers do not generally assist the lead teacher in redirecting student misbehavior.

1. H Professional Development

Merrick's professional development program is not strategic in meeting the needs of the school or its teachers.

Merrick provides regular professional development, though not with sufficient depth to build teachers' skills. Instructional leaders, Victory consultants and other external consultants facilitate half-day professional development sessions every other month and full-day sessions five-to-six times a year. The school also holds a two-week in-service program prior to the start of the school year. Building leaders report using assessment data in order to set the agenda for these sessions; however, an analysis of the professional development calendar shows a lack of coherence and depth in the session schedule sufficient to develop teacher skills. The sessions cover a broad range of instructional practices, representing a variety of disparate topics.

At the sessions, providers give teachers a number of tips to use in their classrooms; however, the strategies do not address basic pedagogical skills and are not sustained over time. The director of curriculum and instruction recently presented a “rigor matrix” to assist teachers in increasing rigor in their daily lessons. Nearly all of the teachers interviewed report not having used the matrix during lesson planning and that they are not clear about how the leaders want them to use it.

Outside of school-wide professional development, teachers have the opportunity to create personalized professional goals based on school benchmarks and personal preferences. Teachers meet with building leaders at the beginning of the year and collaborate on developing goals

essential to increasing individual teacher's pedagogical skills. School leaders and teachers discuss progress toward these goals at mid-year and at the end-of-year meetings.

2. C Organizational Capacity

The school's organizational structure, as implemented, is not sufficient to support the implementation of the academic program.

Since the school's founding leader resigned in 2010, numerous individuals have led the school, all for short periods. Recently, the board changed the organizational structure to reflect a three-director model, with a director of curriculum and instruction serving in the lead role, and a director of operations and director of strategic planning and professional development serving as sub-directors. The board has not filled these positions concurrently in the last three years. With the help of staff from Victory Education Partners, the school adequately manages day-to-day operations, although student achievement has recently dropped, as instructional leaders rotate in and out of the school.

Teachers report being unclear about the respective roles of the school leadership, about the evaluation criteria and about who will evaluate them going forward. They report looking to the school's program manager, who is currently serving as a sub-director to the director of curriculum and instruction, for clear direction. Teachers indicate that they largely rely on each other as a source of support and that adjusting to the demands of new leaders has been a source of confusion.

The school's newest director of curriculum and instruction, whom the board hired in December 2011, is fully aware of the school's responsibility for meeting its Accountability Plan goals. At the time of the visit, she had begun implementing new initiatives to improve student achievement, based on past general experience rather than on specific observation and quantitative data. Due to teacher turnover, during the last two years, many of the school's teachers are new and inexperienced, requiring a significant amount of professional development. The school's professional development and instructional leadership systems are currently insufficient to support these staff members.

The school is currently at full-enrollment and has adequate resources to implement the academic program.

2. D Board Oversight

Given its failure to hire appropriate leadership to carry out its new strategic plan, the board's oversight does not support the implementation of the school's academic program.

Merrick's board has adequate skills and expertise -- including education, human resources and legal -- as well as adequate meeting time, to provide oversight of the school; however, a series of unsuccessful staffing choices have diminished its ability to ensure the success of the academic program. After the founding principal left the school, the board sought to provide more rigorous checks and balances by creating a leadership structure in which three individuals report to the board, rather than continuing with a top-down, principal-led model. The board implemented a co-director model; however, the board has not yet managed to hire and retain individuals in each of

the three roles simultaneously, with several of those hired leaving after only a few months into their tenure. The board persists in maintaining the organizational structure, despite its inability to fill all three positions at the same time. Teachers report that this leadership instability has a negative effect on morale and contributes to the recent decline in student achievement. The board currently receives regular reports from the director of curriculum and instruction; the other two leadership positions are currently vacant. The school board is in the process of renegotiating its contact with Victory Education Partners. The board recently lost several members and hopes to begin recruiting new members in the near future.

The board is aware that the student achievement on the state exams continues to drop during the current Accountability Period. Upon hiring the new director of curriculum and instruction, the board communicated the need for her to rebuild culture, morale and cohesion at the school, which they believe will translate into increased student achievement. Teachers report that morale among teachers has improved since she has come onboard, and both the board and teachers are hopeful that her leadership abilities will lead to gains in student achievement. Nevertheless, the absence of an effective leadership structure since February 2010, coupled with the decline in student achievement reflects a failure of the board to provide rigorous oversight.

APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

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

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

Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and state performance standards; • the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board; • the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; • the school's leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school's academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services; • the school's teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students; • a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; • the school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and • the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
<p>State University</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to</p>

<p>Renewal Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators; • the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school's curriculum framework, identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program; • the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans; • teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school's curriculum; • the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and • the curriculum supports the school's stated mission.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach; • instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators; • instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school's student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments; • all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time; • learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
<p>State University Renewal</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p>

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement; • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement); • the school's instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness; • the school's instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms; • the school's leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas; • the school's instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers; • the school's leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and • the school's leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school's academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs; • all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program; • the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students; • the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures; • all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students' Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals; • the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and • the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.

<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident; • low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers’ pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program; • the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional programs; • annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests; • professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school’s Accountability Plan goals; • teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities; • the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers’ varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities; • the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.

	<p>Renewal Question 2</p> <p>Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</p>
<p><u>Evidence Category</u></p>	<p><u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u></p>

<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2A</p> <p>Mission & Key Design Elements</p>	<p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders are aware of the mission; • the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and • the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school; • the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; • few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school; • a large number of parents seek entrance to the school; • parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and • the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Organizational Capacity</p>	<p>The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations; • staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school's mission; • the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision; • the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals; • the roles and responsibilities of the school's leadership and staff members are clearly defined; • the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability; • the school's management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted; • the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and • the school's management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.

<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Board Oversight</p>	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school; • the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight; • the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders; • the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity; • the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and • the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Governance</p>	<p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities; • the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter; • the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner; • the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely

	<p>fashion on any such complaints;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; • the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and • the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2F</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during its charter period, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL, and Open Meetings Law; • at the time of renewal, the school is in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws, rules and regulations; • over the charter period, the school has abided by the terms of its monitoring plan; • the school has designed and put in place effective systems and controls to ensure that legal and charter requirements were and are met; and • the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house or independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations and handles other legal matters as needed.