



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

November 19, 2010

VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Mr. Steven Solinsky
Chairperson, Board of Trustees
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
c/o Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres(MSF)
333 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001

Re: Final School Evaluation Report

Dear Mr. Solinsky:

Enclosed you will find the Charter Schools Institute's final report of its site visit to Our World Neighborhood Charter School, conducted on April 7, 2009. A draft of this report was made available to you earlier and you were given an opportunity to provide factual corrections and/or other comments.

As you know, this report is part of the State University of New York's charter school monitoring process, and will be used as a reference point for the State University Trustees if and when you choose to seek charter renewal. The report contains conclusions about your school's progress toward fulfilling its charter provisions. As an independent and autonomous public school, it is up to the school to take the necessary steps to fulfill the terms of its charter. As always, we stand ready to assist you in any way appropriate.

Please be advised that we are sharing this report with the State Education Department, which has joint monitoring authority pursuant to Education Law § 2853(2). The report will also be posted to the Institute's website: www.newyorkcharters.org.

I encourage you to contact the Institute if you have any questions about this report or wish to discuss it in detail. We also welcome written comments from you regarding this report and would be happy to include them in the school's file.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Rossi II
Vice President and General Counsel

Enclosure

c: Brian Ferguson, School Leader
Leslie Templeman, New York State Education Department



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Our World Neighborhood Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2008-2009

Visit Date: April 7, 2009

Report Issued: November 19, 2010

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INTRODUCTION

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

- **Facilitate Improvement.** By providing substantive information about the school’s academic, fiscal and organizational strengths and weaknesses to the school’s board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school identify areas for improvement.
- **Disseminate Information.** The Institute disseminates information about the school’s performance not only to its board of trustees, administration and faculty, but to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located.
- **Document Performance.** The Institute collects information to build a database of a school’s performance over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute can more clearly ascertain trends, determine areas of strength and weakness, and assess the school’s likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute is in a better position to make recommendations regarding the renewal of each school’s charter, and the State University Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school’s charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

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

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit to Our World Neighborhood Charter School (OWN), the school appears to be making substantial progress towards achieving its mission. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

Academic Success

The school regularly administers a variety of assessments designed to generate useful information about student mastery of curriculum content, overall learning gains, and preparation for standardized state assessments. With the exception of reading instruction, however, the school does not have comprehensive systems in place for evaluating work or a clear process for using performance data to inform and improve student performance. A number of teachers have individually developed sound practices for collecting data and analyzing results in core subjects.

The school has clearly defined English language arts and mathematics curricula that are generally well-aligned with state performance standards and are being supplemented where the staff have identified gaps. The curricula for other core subjects are in transition, and alignment with state standards has not yet been established. The school's process for selecting curricula has been thoughtful and leadership-driven, whereas the process for reviewing and revising curricula has depended more on individual teacher initiative.

Teachers prepare the instructional content and methods effectively. They generally engage in purposeful and focused lesson planning with objectives that are guided by specific learning standards. The evaluation team found the quality of instruction to be mixed. The school is developing the capacity to identify individual student needs and has the resources, particularly in English language arts, to support differentiated instruction.

The school has strong instructional leadership with high expectations for student achievement. The leadership monitors academic performance closely, and teachers feel supported by the administration. The evaluation team found that the leadership is well-informed about teacher capacities but did not see evidence of a structured teacher evaluation system.

The school appears to provide sufficient resources, clear procedures and adequate training to meet the needs of individual students and is, in turn, demonstrably effective in helping those students. Special education services are appropriate for students' identified needs but are not consistently coordinated with the regular education program.

The school has established a safe and orderly environment that promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The middle school, in particular, has made substantial progress in establishing consistent expectations for all students regarding discipline. The school has not established a common discipline system for use within the classroom, so teachers rely on their own discipline strategies with mixed effectiveness.

The school has a sustained professional development program that assists teachers effectively by addressing identified shortcomings in pedagogical skills and content knowledge. Professional development takes the form of both general guidance and individualized coaching. Such coaching is, by all reports, beneficial and well received.

Organizational Capacity

One of the school's primary educational goals is to prepare students for success in high school. OWN board members, leaders and teachers understand that mission and are committed to fulfilling it. The board demonstrates appropriate focus, skills and priorities in carrying out its governance responsibilities. Its current composition indicates the legal, community, financial and other expertise needed to carry out its responsibilities.

The school's maturation as an organization is reflected in more consistent and effective delegation of management responsibilities by the school's leadership. Administrators have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with respect to curriculum development, staff evaluation, and professional development.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the charter of Our World Neighborhood Charter School (“OWN”) on January 23, 2001, and the Board of Regents voted to approve the charter on March 19th of that same year. Utilizing the 2001-02 school year as a planning year, the school opened on September 30, 2002 (slightly delayed due to issues regarding the completion of its facility) serving 382 students in kindergarten through 5th grade. OWN added one grade per year through 2005-06, growing to serve students in kindergarten through 8th grade. The school served 704 students in 2008-09 school year.

Since 2005, OWN has operated from two locations: the elementary school, serving kindergarten through 5th grade, is housed at 36-12 35th Avenue in Astoria (Queens); and the middle school, serving 6th through 8th grade, is located at 31-20 37th Street in Astoria. The buildings are within walking distance of each other, which helps to minimize the challenges associated with operating separate locations. The school reports serving students representing 50 different home countries in Western Queens, an area it describes as “the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in the United States.”

On April 4, 2006, the State University Trustees granted OWN a one-year Short-Term Planning Year Renewal effective through July 31, 2007 with the provision that the school provide detail regarding the desired devolution of its relationship with Mosaica Schools Inc., its management company since inception. The school met that condition and on March 20, 2007, the State University Trustees granted OWN a Full-Term Renewal of five years.

As of the date of the current evaluation visit, the school’s board of trustees was comprised of the following individuals:

- Mr. Steven Zimmerman, Board President;
- Ms. Anastasia Macris, Co-Vice President;
- Ms. Jeanette Betancourt, Co-Vice President;
- Ms. Melissa Chin;
- Mr. Steven Solinsky;
- Mr. Pedro Rivera;
- Mr. Richard Welles;
- Ms. Mary Bogle;
- Mr. Douglas Brody; and
- Mr. Michael Buonasora.

OWN’s mission statement is as follows:

It is the mission of Our World Neighborhood Charter School to educate our students to become independent thinkers and lifelong learners. We are committed to an educational philosophy based on inquiry, active and experiential learning, and social justice. Through a literacy-based, integrated and standards-driven curriculum that encourages community and honors diversity, OWN students receive the broad education they will need to meet the academic and social challenges of the best New York City high schools, and indeed, to thrive in today’s world.

Key design elements include:

- rigorous liberal arts education that includes art, music, physical education and foreign language as well as a balanced literacy approach to the teaching of reading and writing;
- integration of all students into the classroom through a curriculum aimed at building community, honoring diversity and addressing multiple intelligences;
- providing opportunities to students for remediation as well as enrichment;
- fostering social and cultural awareness through an interdisciplinary, project-driven social studies curriculum;
- fully integrating technology in the classroom;
- supporting teachers through extensive and continuous professional development; and
- providing multiple opportunities for family involvement in the activities and governance of the school.

School Year (2008-09)

190 instructional days

School Day (2008-09)

Elementary Grades: Periods 0-9 running from 7:50 a.m. through 3:10 p.m.

Middle School Grades: Periods 1-8 running from 8:30 a.m. through 3:30 p.m.

Enrollment

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2001-02	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year
2002-03	249	450	382	K-5	K-5	K-5	Yes
2003-04	475	525	530	K-6	K-6	K-6	Yes
2004-05	550	600	575	K-7	K-7	K-7	Yes
2005-06	625	675	650	K-8	K-8	K-8	Yes
2006-07	700	-	670	K-8	-	K-8	Yes
2007-08	725	-	701	K-8	-	K-8	Yes
2008-09	725	-	704	K-8	-	K-8	Yes

¹ Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the New York State Education Department School Report Card and Database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

Demographic Data²

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD 30 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD 30 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD 30 Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black or African American	18	10	17	10	17	9
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	12	23	14	22	14	22
Hispanic	36	51	36	52	38	53
White	34	16	33	16	31	15
Multiracial ³	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities	8.5	N/A	7.2	12.0	N/A	N/A
Limited English Proficient	6.3	22.6	5.9	22.8	7.0	25.0
Free/Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	42	67	31	68	21	67
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	17	11	14	11	11	11

² Source: 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 School Report Cards (New York State Education Department). Note the Department of Education does not report special education data.

³ Multiracial enrollment data were not collected statewide in the 2005-06 school year.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Background

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

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

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

Summary of Previous Evaluation Visits

On March 9, 2007, the Charter Schools Institute recommended that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for renewal of Our World Neighborhood Public Charter School. The Trustees approved the recommendation and renewed the school's charter for a period of five years. The rationale for the charter renewal was explained in the Renewal Report and is summarized below.

Our World Neighborhood Charter School ("OWN") generally met the academic program goals in its Accountability Plan. The school for the most part met the plan's measures in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics pertaining to state examinations, but had not met its value-added measures showing year-to-year gains of students on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

Our World Neighborhood Charter School had established a variety of key resources including an elaborate administrative support network, a system of curriculum review and planning, a variety of internal assessments, and an administrative team that teachers viewed as resources for support and professional development. In particular, the Institute noted that the new middle school principal, with a strong focus on teaching quality and interpreting and

using assessment data, had the potential to serve as a model instructional leader within the administrative team and the school.

The Renewal Report identified some areas for improvement, including the varied delivery of instruction, lack of clinical supervision of teaching including coaching and formative feedback, and uneven use of existing internal and external assessment data to inform instructional decisions. Some teachers had expressed a desire to have more in-class supervision and support regarding classroom management.

Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)

The school regularly administers a variety of assessments designed to generate useful information about student mastery of curriculum content, overall learning gains, and prepare for standardized state assessments. The school's consistent use of standardized assessments includes annual (spring to spring) administration of the Terra Nova and practice state assessments. In addition, the school relies on a variety of informal and formal teacher-administered assessments ranging from "Do Nows" at the beginning of a class to Running Records, which are used to track progress and status of reading comprehension, to quarterly assessments in core subjects. In most classes, the quarterly assessments included questions tailored both to curriculum content and to state test preparation.

With guidance and training from Teachers College, the school is implementing a comprehensive system for evaluating and tracking student reading performance in a way that directly informs instruction. At the beginning of the year, teachers evaluated reading levels to determine what books students should be reading and grouped students accordingly. Even in other subjects, teachers refer to students' reading levels to guide appropriate reading selections. Throughout the year, reading teachers use Running Records to evaluate progress and status based on specific expectations for growth over the course of the year.

With the exception of reading instruction, the school does not have comprehensive systems in place for evaluating work or a clear process for using performance data to inform and improve student performance; however, a number of teachers have developed individually sound practices for collecting data and analyzing results in core subjects. For example, fifth grade teachers reported that they conduct item analysis on quarterly assessments for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The school charts student performance on quarterly math assessments beginning in third grade, but the use of that data to inform instruction for individual students or the class as a whole is up to the initiative of individual teachers. In social studies and science, consistent systems for evaluating work and using performance data are generally lacking. Thus, the school's practices as a whole do not demonstrate a common understanding of how performance data are to be used to inform instruction.

Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)

The school has clearly defined English language arts and mathematics curricula that are generally well-aligned with state performance standards in both reading and mathematics. Teachers report that recent changes have helped to establish curricula that are better aligned

with state standards. Teachers understand strengths and gaps in the “off-the-shelf” curricula. For example, third grade teachers noted the need to augment the mathematics curriculum with focus on specific skills, and middle school teachers observed that the new writing curriculum requires supplementation with additional attention to grammar. This combination of relatively well-aligned “off-the-shelf” curricula and careful attention to gaps indicates sound English language arts and mathematics content.

For subjects other than mathematics and English language arts, curricular alignment is not clear. The science curriculum is new this year, and the school has focused primarily on preparing teachers to implement a new “hands-on” approach rather than on standards-alignment of the underlying content. For social studies, like science, the curriculum is in transition and has not yet received the same attention to standards and alignment as mathematics and English language arts. In addition, limited interaction between the elementary and middle schools means that the school currently lacks a venue for aligning curriculum vertically across divisions.

Teachers are receiving substantial guidance on effective implementation of the new curricula. For example, 3rd grade teachers have weekly meetings to map out day-to-day instruction. As a team, 5th grade teachers plan lessons monthly by genre and target skill(s); they report drawing on numerous resources that include outside consultants, a staff developer, and off-site professional development opportunities. The leadership has also introduced a process by which teachers periodically use a journal to reflect on their lesson plan implementation.

The school has a thoughtful, leadership-driven process for selecting curricula, while the process for reviewing and revising curricula depends on individual teacher initiative. For selection, the curriculum director reports that she researches options, elicits feedback from teachers, discusses options with the principal, and presents recommendations to the school’s principal and board. Standards alignment is one of the primary considerations. With respect to curriculum revision, the school does not yet have a coherent process in place. One teacher reported working individually to revise the curriculum when she “finds gaps.” Other teachers report “tweaking” the new science curriculum based on their experience. At this stage, the school appropriately focuses organizational resources more heavily on implementation of the new curriculum than on its assessment or revision.

Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)

Teachers prepare the instructional content and methods effectively. They generally engage in purposeful and focused lesson planning with objectives that are guided by specific learning standards. Such planning is often facilitated by grade-level team lesson plan development that takes a two- to four-week view of the learning objectives and methods to be used. Many teachers follow a consistent format that the school has modeled such as Do Now, Activities, Assessment, and an Assignment. Teachers are asked to reflect periodically on the effectiveness of their lessons in a way that has potential to support a cycle of continuous improvement.

The evaluation team found the quality of instruction to be mixed. In general, they observed instructional rigor and engagement to be stronger in English language arts than in mathematics and science; however, even in English language arts, teachers in the same grade often delivered similar lessons with widely varying levels of focus and student engagement.

For example, one teacher delivered a writing lesson by relying on a model text that clearly focused student attention while another addressed the same topic by engaging students in a vague discussion that did not give students clear guidance on how to complete the assigned task.

The school is developing the capacity to identify individual student needs and has the resources, particularly in English language arts, to support differentiated instruction. The reading workshop model, with tools such as Running Records and leveled readers, facilitates English language arts teachers' ability to differentiate instruction to meet a broader range of student needs. Similarly, the school has mathematics performance data from internal and standardized assessments that can be used to determine individual learning needs.

Nevertheless, the school is currently making limited use of its resources to differentiate instruction. The evaluation team observed classes in which there were several adults present but no clarity regarding each adult's role or responsibility for student learning. Nor did most teachers demonstrate the range of instructional strategies that could facilitate differentiation within a classroom. Those factors limit the value of the school's performance information and staffing resources for meeting students' differentiated learning needs.

Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)

The school has strong instructional leadership with high expectations for student achievement. The leadership monitors academic performance closely, and teachers feel supported by the administration. A primary focus for the school's instructional leadership has been effective implementation of new curricula in several core subjects. The principal has overseen curriculum decisions that have followed a sound selection process, including research of curricular options by informed staff and input from teachers.

The leadership provides teachers with substantial resources to guide planning and instruction. Much of that support is provided in-house as teachers receive guidance from assistant principals, deans, and the principal. Team meetings are frequently used to develop planning and instruction, and data team analysis often informs that work. The school also provides teachers with substantial support in mathematics and English language arts from consultants, and teachers noted that the school is effective in getting them the resources that they request, such as textbooks and Smart Boards.

The evaluation team found that the leadership is well-informed about teacher capacities but did not see evidence of a structured teacher evaluation system. The principal is articulate in discussing strengths and concerns about teacher performance. He has delegated responsibility for formal evaluation to the assistant principals, but the school did not have formal teacher evaluations from the current school year available for review. Teachers reported having been observed informally by various members of the leadership team, including the principal, and receiving verbal feedback. They had not received formal feedback with respect to lesson plans that they submit regularly or to their teaching in general.

At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)

The school appears to provide sufficient resources, clear procedures and adequate training to meet the needs of individual students and is, in turn, demonstrably effective in helping those students. During classes, teachers regularly devote extra attention to at-risk students by presenting information in multiple ways and by checking understanding verbally. During small group instruction, the classroom teacher or a “push-in” content teacher provides additional support. Teachers use flexible instructional time, such as lab time and peer tutoring, to work with at-risk students. Those supports are informed by professional development designed to help teachers understand how struggling students perceive their environments. In addition to supports during the regular school day, students can receive tutoring during Homework Help after school. After school Math and Language Arts Academies are also an option for students who have not demonstrated proficiency in meeting state standards.

Special education services are appropriate for students’ identified needs but are not consistently coordinated with the regular education program. In a few cases, teachers’ lesson plans included specific modifications for students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). In most cases, there was no discernible accommodation or adaptation of instruction for students with IEPs. In addition, classes often did not reflect clearly defined responsibilities or tasks for the adults with support roles. Although teachers understand the procedures for using IEPs, much of the school’s work to implement IEPs happens informally.

Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)

The school has established a safe and orderly environment that promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The middle school, in particular, has made substantial progress in establishing consistent expectations for all students regarding discipline. The school has common procedures for dealing with serious discipline issues, and both teachers and administrators have developed better internal communication regarding student conduct. To the extent that the evaluation team observed behavioral issues, they appeared to be specific to a classroom rather than characteristic of the school.

The school has not established a common discipline system for use within the classroom, so teachers rely on their own discipline strategies with mixed effectiveness. Thus, there are low-level behavior and discipline issues that some teachers tolerate while others do not, and there are behavior issues that some teachers are simply less effective at managing. The school’s expectation that most discipline issues be handled within the classroom is reasonable, but student learning is affected where teachers lack effective management strategies.

Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)

The school has a sustained professional development program that assists teachers effectively by addressing identified shortcomings in pedagogical skills and content knowledge. Teachers report receiving substantial professional development, especially around implementation of new curricula. For example, in English language arts, a staff developer for the newly-adopted Writing Project has come to the school two to three times per week throughout the year to model lessons in reading and writing, among other things. English

language arts teachers have also received guidance on lesson plan development following a consistent format based on the new curriculum. In addition to the external support, teachers receive internal development support from curriculum directors, and a portion of staff meetings are devoted to professional development. Professional development takes the form of both general guidance and individualized coaching. Such coaching is, by all reports, beneficial and well received.

Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)

One of the school's primary educational goals is to prepare students for success in high school. OWN board members, leaders and teachers understand that mission and are committed to fulfilling it. It is notable that when OWN has not been satisfied with its educational performance, the school's leadership has been willing and able to adopt new curricula and to dedicate substantial resources towards its effective implementation. In addition, the high school guidance program includes counseling on high school options, as well as preparation and coaching for specialized high school entrance exams. OWN students have been accepted to some of the most competitive high school programs in the city, and the school takes meaningful steps to ensure that all students have quality high school options.

Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)

The school's maturation as an organization is reflected in more consistent and effective delegation of management responsibilities by the school's leadership. Administrators have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with respect to curriculum development, staff evaluation, and professional development. Staff appear to work within these roles more consistently than in previous years. When asked what the school does well, several teachers noted the smoothness of the transition when the middle school principal left on maternity leave and was replaced on an interim basis. Board members observe that the principal's ability to delegate effectively makes him better able to focus attention on long-term priorities – another indication of a school that is maturing towards being less dependent on an individual leader and more sustainable as an organization.

Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)

The board demonstrates appropriate focus, skills and priorities in carrying out its governance responsibilities. Its current composition includes the legal, community, financial and other expertise necessary to carry out its responsibilities. The board has a committee structure that has worked effectively in managing facilities and finance issues; the education committee is in the process of being re-established. Activities of the whole board, as reflected in meeting minutes, indicate appropriate engagement in organizational priorities such as Accountability Plan performance, communication and engagement with families, and long-term facility plans. The board gives appropriate day-to-day management authority to the principal while evaluating him formally each year. Overall, the board has focused its school oversight appropriately and has sufficient information to carry out its responsibilities effectively.

Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Seventh Year of Operation (second year of

second charter) Visit at Our World Neighborhood Charter School on April 7, 2009. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

William Haft (External Consultant and Team Leader) founded and directs Prometheus Project Consulting, an education consulting firm that specializes in school development, contracting, governance and accountability. He works regularly with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), where his responsibilities have included developing the charter contract for post-Katrina charter schools in New Orleans and managing a statewide charter school application process in Florida. Other clients include the Renaissance Schools Fund, the Raza Development Fund, and Cambridge Education. William is a former school teacher and attorney and serves on the Board of Directors of Democracy Prep Charter School in New York City. He holds a J.D. (*cum laude*) from Harvard Law School and M.Ed. (Administration) from Arizona State University.

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

Susan Seymour is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. In the past, Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999, she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

Christina Grant (External Team Member) is Deputy Executive Director of the Charter Schools Office at the New York City Department of Education. Ms. Grant worked at Uncommon Schools following a role as a teacher at KIPP Academy Charter School in the Bronx, where she taught 6th and 7th grade English language arts. Ms. Grant started her career in education as a Teach For America corps member in Harlem. During her corps member years, she served as a 6th grade teacher, literacy coach, and comprehensive school design reform coordinator. She also worked for Teach For America as a Team Leader and Content Specialist. Ms. Grant received a dual B.A. in Political Science and African American Studies from Hofstra University and her M.S.T. in Curriculum and Instruction from Fordham University.

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 Renewal Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to 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

	<p>indicators;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong 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 ongoing 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

	<p>grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 ongoing 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>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>

<p>Professional Development</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.
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<p>Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</p>	
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<p><u>Evidence Category</u></p>	<p><u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u></p>
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<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.
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<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.
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<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Organizational</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>
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<p>Capacity</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 ongoing 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>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</p>

Governance

Elements that are generally present include:

- the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities;
- the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity;
- the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter;
- the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner;
- the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints;
- the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies;
- the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and
- the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Charter Schools and the State University of New York

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

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

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

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

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

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits

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

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

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

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

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

Keeping This Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State

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

University Trustees and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

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

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

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

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

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