



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Tapestry Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2007-2008

December 24, 2008

**Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277, 518/427-6510 (fax)
<http://www.newyorkcharters.org>**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT	2
SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.....	4
ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT	8
Academic Performance through 2006-07	9
Performance Summary for English Language Arts	10
Performance Summary for Mathematics	11
SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT	12
Background.....	12
Summary of Previous Evaluation Visit	12
Evaluation Visit: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence	13
Conduct of the Visit.....	19
APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT.....	21
APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	23
Charter Schools and the State University of New York	23
The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits	23
Keeping This Report in Context	25

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The State University Trustees, however, 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 data 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 that school’s renewal decision. These data include student performance results, financial audits, any legal records of issues addressed, board meeting minutes, and reports from regular inspection visits conducted by the Institute (or external experts contracted by the Institute) and other agencies with oversight responsibilities.

This annual School Evaluation Report includes four primary components. The first, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the conclusions of the inspection team regarding this year’s evaluation visit to the school. The second, titled School Description, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the school’s establishment. The third component, titled Academic Attainment and Improvement, is a review of academic performance based on assessment results through the previous school year. Finally, this report presents the evidence and conclusions from a one-day inspection visit conducted in the current school year titled School Evaluation Visit. Within this final section is a summary of conclusions from the previous school inspection.

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. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards of trustees to use this evaluation report in planning school improvement efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the present visit to the Tapestry Charter School on May 12 and 13, 2008. Inspectors visited classrooms, reviewed documents, and interviewed instructional and administrative staff. At the time of the visit, many elementary school teachers were unavailable for interviews and observations as the result of 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students being out of the building as part of the school's continual field work component of the school's academic program. Consequently, evidence collected at the elementary school level was limited. Conclusions of the inspectors are summarized below. The evidence base and further analysis is contained in the Benchmark Analysis and Evidence section which follows.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

Based on performance data available at the time of the inspection visit, at the elementary school level Tapestry had consistently met its Accountability Plan goals in English language arts and mathematics. The school also achieved its science goal, but did not achieve its social studies goal. Goals applying to high school grades were not applicable in the 2006-07 school year.

Use of Assessment Data

At the high school level, the school was developing internal systems of assessment to track student progress and growth. Because these systems were still in development, it was unclear how they would influence instructional effectiveness and student learning. As has been true throughout the life of the school, the elementary school continues to use a Work Sampling System to document students' skills, knowledge, behavior, and achievements across the content areas.

Curriculum

Individual teachers develop disciplinary curriculum for their own use. At the time of the inspection visit, the school had not yet developed a systematic way to ensure internal consistency within content areas and across grade levels. Additionally, there did not seem to be an overarching set of school-specific curriculum documents to guide teachers in their planning.

Instructional leadership

Leaders and teachers are highly committed to the school's vision. This commitment is evident in the structural foundations of the school, including professional development planning and the master schedule. There was little evidence that school leaders have developed a comprehensive and ongoing system for evaluating and supporting teachers' or administrators effectiveness and quality.

High quality instruction

High quality instruction was not evident in all classrooms at grades nine and ten. Due to the unavailability of teachers at the time of the visit, inspectors were unable to observe the quality of instruction across Kindergarten through 8th grade classrooms.

At risk students

At the high school level, the school is developing structures and processes to support students at risk of failing, including hiring an extra literacy teacher, in school and after school tutors, and scheduling times for remediation during academic support periods (AS), on Saturdays, and during "intensive weeks" at the end of each trimester. The school has yet to document the effectiveness of these newly implemented structures. Again, because many elementary students and teachers were out of the building at the time of the visit, inspectors collected limited evidence regarding elementary level

remediation efforts. Limited evidence collected at the elementary school level suggests that remediation efforts take place during the school day, and consist of a combination of pull-out and push-in from special educators and/or the reading specialists.

Student order and discipline

Students across the Tapestry school demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in social and presentation skills. At the high school level, the school's code of conduct is not yet consistently enforced, and many teachers tolerate a low level of misbehavior. Limited evidence suggests that there may not be a common set of behavior expectations from Kindergarten through 8th grades.

Professional development

Tapestry staff generally conveyed a strong belief that the Expeditionary Learning related professional development opportunities are aligned with the school's priorities and are of high quality. Teachers also indicated an appreciation for the weekly and ongoing professional development meetings that allowed time for interaction with colleagues. At the time of the school visit, the school had yet to develop a systematic way to assess instruction to identify instructional weaknesses and teacher interests as part of a professional development needs assessment.

Governance

Tapestry benefits from a strong board of trustees that is committed to the vision of the school. The board has been working to construct a new building to house both the upper and lower schools in one facility. Several board members are involved in the process of developing programs to support a professional development school partnership with Canisius College, which would include a mentor program, self study program, and teacher training programs.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application for Tapestry Charter School (“Tapestry”) on January 23, 2001, and the initial charter was issued by the Board of Regents on April 24, 2001. The school opened its doors with 104 students in kindergarten through fourth grades in September of 2001. Tapestry followed its plan and added fifth and sixth grades within the term of its initial charter. Also, in October 2003, Tapestry requested, and subsequently received, permission to add seventh grade in 2004-05 and eighth grade in 2005-06.

Tapestry Charter School submitted an Application for Charter Renewal in June, 2005, and was granted a full-term, five-year charter renewal by the State University Trustees on September 20, 2005. As part of the renewal application process, the school requested to add one grade each year within the term of the Renewal Charter until a full kindergarten through twelve grade program is established (2009-10). The State University Trustees authorized this plan as part of the renewal decision. The school enrolled 349 students in kindergarten through tenth grades in 2007-08. Tapestry Charter School is located in two separate facilities; the kindergarten through eighth grade program is housed at 40 North Street in Buffalo, while the ninth and tenth grades are located at 2253 Main Street in Buffalo.

As of the date of the current school inspection, the Board of Trustees of Tapestry Charter School was comprised of the following individuals:

- Ms. Amy Friedman, Chairperson
- Mr. H. Samuel Givens, Vice Chairperson
- Ms. Nancy Wallace, Secretary
- Ms. Cindy Walawander, Treasurer
- Mr. Teo Balbach
- Mr. Thomas M. Burns
- Ms. Bobbie Dukarm
- Mr. Steven Polowitz
- Mr. Marc Shatkin

The Tapestry Charter School mission, as stated in their Renewal Charter, is as follows:

Tapestry Charter School provides a challenging and rigorous education in an environment that emphasized diversity, compassion, collaboration, community, creativity, and leadership, so that students are academically and socially prepared to meet the demands of further education while maturing into productive and caring adults with a lifelong passion for learning.

The Tapestry Charter School is a learning center providing challenging educational opportunities in a multi-age setting. It provides an environment where students are encouraged to become self-directed, independent learners. Progressive, interdisciplinary

teaching techniques are utilized, along with the best resources available to fit the individual learning style of each student. The academic program will blend age groups, with student movement in different subject areas, according to ability and interest. Parent involvement will be a significant component in the success of the Tapestry Charter School.

Key design elements for Tapestry Charter School's kindergarten through eighth grade program, as stated in the school's Application for Initial Charter Renewal, include:

- multi-aged classrooms;
- a school culture of caring;
- progressive teaching techniques, based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences;
- weaving together humanities, science, arts, and social responsibility;
- family and community engagement; and
- ongoing professional development.

Key design elements for Tapestry Charter School's high school grades, as stated in the school's Application for Initial Charter Renewal, include:

- rigorous academics with real world learning;
- a school culture of caring;
- physical and emotional fitness;
- knowledge and understanding of the arts;
- family and community engagement; and
- ongoing professional development.

School Year (2007-08)

183 instructional days

School Day (2007-08)

K – 4: 8:15 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

5 – 8: 8:15 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.

9 – 12: 8:45 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment¹	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2001-02	100	105	104	K-4	K-4	K-4	YES
2002-03	120	132	132	K-5	K-5	K-5	YES
2003-04	140	162	163	K-6	K-6	K-6	YES
2004-05	160	192	192	K-6	K-8	K-7	YES
2005-06	180	216	217	K-6	K-8	K-8	YES
2006-07	264	264	269	K-9	K-9	K-9	YES
2007-08	336	336	349	K-10	K-10	K-10	YES
2008-09	408	408	425	K-11	K-11	K-11	YES
2009-10	480			K-12			
2010-11	504			K-12			

Race/Ethnicity	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	% of Enroll. Tapestry Charter	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD	% of Enroll. Tapestry Charter	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.0 %	2.0 %	0.0 %	1.0 %
Black or African American	25.0 %	58.0 %	25.0 %	57.0 %
Hispanic	8.0 %	14.0 %	9.0 %	14.0 %
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	3.0 %	1.0 %	3.0 %	1.0 %
White	64.0 %	26.0 %	63.0 %	26.0 %

Source: 2004-05, 2005-06: School Report Card (New York State Education Department); 2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

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.

	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
Special Populations	% of Enroll. Tapestry Charter	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD	% of Enroll. Tapestry Charter	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD	% of Enroll. Tapestry Charter	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD
Students with Disabilities	NA	NA	NA	NA	10.0 %	20.0 %
Limited English Proficient	0.0 %	7.0 %	0.0 %	7.0 %	0.0 %	6.5 %

Source: Students with Disabilities: New York State Education Department Database
Limited English Proficient: 2004-05, 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card
2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
Free/Reduced Lunch	% of Enroll. Tapestry	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD	% of Enroll. Tapestry	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD	% of Enroll. Tapestry	% of Enroll. Buffalo CSD
Eligible for Free Lunch	18.0 %	67.0 %	18.0 %	67.0 %	22.3 %	65.0 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	11.0 %	10.0 %	8.0 %	10.0 %	7.1 %	8.0 %

Source: 2004-05, 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card
2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
1 st Charter – 1 st Year	2001-02	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter; End-of-Year Evaluation Report	None
1 st Charter – 2 nd Year	2002-03	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	None
1 st Charter – 3 rd Year	2003-04	3 rd	YES	External End-of-Year Evaluation Report	None
1 st Charter – 4 th Year	2004-05	4 th	NO		None
1 st Charter – 5 th Year	2005-06	5 th	YES	Initial Renewal Report	Full Term Renewal of a period of Five Years awarded
2 nd Charter – 1 st Year	2006-07	6 th	NO		None
2 nd Charter – 2 nd Year	2007-08	7 th	YES	Annual Evaluation Report	None

ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Background

Each charter school authorized by the State University Trustees has adopted an Accountability Plan, the primary purpose of which is to lay out the specific student achievement goals that a school agrees to meet and the specific measures that define what constitutes meeting these goals. The Institute currently requires a common set of goals and outcome measures which represent the expectations for student learning and achievement at the time of renewal. Individual schools may also have chosen to include in their Accountability Plans additional academic, organizational or other goals and measures. Schools should be aware that Accountability Plans developed prior to the Institute's establishment of common goals and outcome measures may not include all of the currently required measures. However, at renewal, those plans will be revised to reflect current measures.

Below is a narrative that provides an analysis of how this school measured up to the goals in its Accountability Plan as well as the Institute's required goals and measures should they not already be included in the school's Accountability Plan. The narrative summarizes the results of the relevant measures, and is followed by School Performance Summaries for English language arts and mathematics. The School Performance Summaries are one page compilations of performance data, for the last three years, based on the Institute's required measures. As noted above, the common measures used in the Performance Summaries may differ from the actual measures in the school's Accountability Plan, but are presented to provide trend data and consistency across schools. At the time of renewal, schools will be held accountable for the measures in their Accountability Plan, but the Institute will take into account other performance data as well.

Most state exams are administered in the winter and spring; official results are typically not released until at least early summer. Similarly, schools are not required to submit Accountability Plan Progress Reports until August. As a consequence, results for this current school year from state and school administered assessments were not available at the time this report was written. Therefore, the following evaluation of school performance addresses assessment results up to and including the previous school year. These are the same data the school would have had available and considered at the beginning of this school year and used to make critical decisions related to this year's academic program. These are also the same data the school inspection team relied on at the time of its visit.

Academic Performance through 2006-07

Performance Summary: At the elementary school level, Tapestry has met its Accountability Plan goals in English language arts and mathematics. The school also achieved its science goal, but did not achieve its social studies goal. Goals for the high school grades were not applicable in the 2006-07 school year. In addition, Tapestry met its parent satisfaction, legal compliance and fiscal soundness goals.

English language arts: In 2006-07 Tapestry achieved its goal. In 2004-05 on the state's 4th grade assessment 87 percent of students scored at the proficient level, which exceeded the 75 percent target. The following year when students in 3rd through 8th grades took the state test 76 percent were proficient, and 85 percent were proficient in 2006-07. The school has consistently exceeded the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) and outperformed the Buffalo school district in each of the last three years. In 2006-07 the school's performance exceeded the local district by 50 percentage points. In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Tapestry has performed better than predicted for the last three years and by increasingly large margins each year. Examining growth on the state exam, in 2006-07 two out of five cohorts achieved their target, and overall performance increased.

Mathematics: Tapestry came close to achieving its goal in 2006-07. In 2004-05 on the state's 4th grade assessment 100 percent of the students scored at the proficient level, which exceeded the 75 percent target. The following year when students in 3rd through 8th grades took the state test 69 percent were proficient, and 82 percent were proficient in 2006-07. The school has consistently exceeded the AMO and outperformed the Buffalo school district in each of the last three years. In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Tapestry performed better than predicted in 2004-05, worse than predicted in 2005-06, and slightly better than predicted in 2006-07, though not by enough to achieve its target (0.3 Effect Size). Examining growth on the state assessment, in 2006-07 one out of five cohorts achieved their target, and overall performance remained about the same.

Science: Based on limited data, it appears Tapestry has achieved its goal. In 2006-07 on the 4th grade test 100 percent of the students scored at the proficient level and 74 percent did so on the 8th grade test. Comparison data for the local school district were not available.

Social Studies: Based on limited data, Tapestry did not achieve its goal. In 2006-07 on the 5th grade test 88 percent of the students scored at the proficient level. However, only 48 percent were proficient on the 8th grade assessment. Comparison data for the local school district were not available.

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

Additional Goals (optional): Tapestry achieved its parent and student satisfaction goal. In terms of retention, 91 percent of the school's students in 2006-07 re-enrolled for the following year, exceeding the 90 percent target. In addition, the school had an average daily attendance rate of 96 percent, just above the 95 percent target. Tapestry also reported meeting its legal compliance and fiscal soundness goals.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts

Tapestry Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: K-7			MET	2005-06 Grades Served: K-8			MET	2006-07 Grades Served: K-9			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)			
<u>ABSOLUTE MEASURES</u>														
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4	83.3 (24)	87.0 (23)	YES	3	79.2 (24)	77.0 (21)		3	92.0 (25)	92.0 (25)			
	8	(0)	(0)		4	92.3 (26)	92.0 (26)		4	88.5 (26)	91.3 (23)			
					5	95.5 (22)	94.0 (18)		5	82.6 (23)	86.7 (15)			
					6	76.0 (25)	75.0 (24)		6	81.8 (22)	88.2 (17)			
					7	72.0 (25)	70.0 (23)		7	80.0 (25)	82.6 (23)			
					8	47.8 (21)	45.0 (20)		8	72.0 (25)	69.6 (23)			
					All	77.6 (143)	75.8 (132)	YES	All	82.9 (146)	84.9 (126)	YES		
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.	Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO		Grades	PI	AMO			
	4	183	131	YES	3-8	175	122	YES	3-8	182	122	YES		
	8													
<u>COMPARATIVE MEASURES</u>	Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)				Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)				Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)					
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.	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District			
	4	87.0	39.2	YES	3-8	75.8	30.1	YES	3-8	84.9	34.5	YES		
	8													
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate.	Grades	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	N	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size		
	4	83.3	80.2	0.34	143	77.6	69.7	0.65	22.3	82.9	71.0	1.13		
	8													
<u>VALUE ADDED MEASURE</u>	Assessment: TERRA NOVA					Assessment: TERRA NOVA				Assessment: NYSTP				
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the NYSTP. An asterick indicates cohort met target.	Grades	Cohorts Making Target			Grades	Cohorts Making Target			Gr	N	Base	Target	Result	NO
	1,4,5	3 of 5		NO	NA	of		--	4	23	78.3	78.4	91.3	*
	N	Base	Target	Result	N	Base	Target	Result	5	16	87.5	87.6	87.5	
	86	64.8	64.9	64.1					6	18	94.4	94.5	88.9	
									7	24	79.2	79.3	83.3	*
									8	23	69.6	72.3	69.6	
									All	104	80.8	80.9	83.7	

Data Sources: New York State and City data, workbooks submitted by schools and databases compiled by the Institute.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics

Tapestry Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: K-7			MET	2005-06 Grades Served: K-8			MET	2006-07 Grades Served: K-9			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)					
<u>ABSOLUTE MEASURES</u>																
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4	100.0 (24)	100.0 (23)	YES	3	95.8 (24)	95.0 (21)	NO	3	100.0 (25)	100.0 (25)	YES				
	4				4	88.5 (26)	89.0 (26)		4	92.0 (25)	95.7 (23)					
	5				5	90.9 (22)	100.0 (18)		5	59.1 (22)	76.9 (13)					
	6				6	60.0 (25)	63.0 (24)		6	90.5 (21)	93.8 (16)					
	7				7	52.0 (25)	52.0 (23)		7	84.0 (25)	87.0 (23)					
	8	(0)	(0)		8	19.0 (21)	15.0 (20)		8	40.0 (25)	39.1 (23)					
					All	68.5 (143)	69.0 (132)		All	77.6 (143)	82.1 (123)					
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.	Grades	PI	AMO	YES	Grades	PI	AMO	YES	Grades	PI	AMO	YES				
	4	200	142		3-8	159	86		3-8	173	86					
	8		93													
<u>COMPARATIVE MEASURES</u>																
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.	Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)			YES	Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)			YES	Comparison: (Buffalo City Schools)			YES				
	Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District		Grades	School	District					
	4	100.0	66.5		3-8	69.0	28.6		3-8	82.1	35.9					
	8															
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on the Free Lunch (FL) rate.	Grades	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	YES	N	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	NO	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	NO	
	4	100.0	92.2	1.32		143	68.5	73.9	-0.22		22.3	77.6	78.4	0.12		
	8															
<u>VALUE ADDED MEASURE</u>																
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam. An asterick indicates cohort met target.	Assessment: TERRA NOVA				NO	Assessment: TERRA NOVA				--	Assessment: NYSTP					NO
	Grades	Cohorts Making Target				Grades	Cohorts Making Target				Gr	N	Base	Target	Result	
	3-7	2 of 5					of				4	23	95.7	95.8	95.7	
	N	Base	Target	Result		N	Base	Target	Result		5	14	78.6	78.7	71.4	
	85	58.8	58.9	59.9					6	17	100.0	100.0	94.1			
									7	24	62.5	68.8	87.5 *			
									8	23	52.2	63.6	39.1			
									All	101	76.2	76.3	77.2			

Data Sources: New York State and City data, workbooks submitted by schools and databases compiled by the Institute.

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, assessment, and 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 inspection 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), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety 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 the previous inspection visit to the school. This information is used by the inspection team in preparation for this year's inspection and assists the observers in understanding the accomplishments of the school and the challenges it 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 inspection 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 inspection, along with supporting evidence. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the inspection, including the date of the visit and information about the Inspection Team is provided.

Summary of Previous Evaluation Visit

In the fall of 2005, the State University Trustees granted Tapestry Charter School ("Tapestry") a full-term, five-year charter renewal with authority to offer instruction in Kindergarten through eighth grades. The school was also granted permission to expand its program to grade twelve by adding one grade in each successive year of the renewal charter term. Prior to making this renewal recommendation, the Charter Schools Institute conducted a renewal visit to the school during which Institute staff observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed documents. Key observations are summarized below.

At the time of the renewal visit, Tapestry had met or exceeded all but one of its goals on the key outcome measures of its Accountability Plan. In its absolute level of performance on fourth grade state examinations, Tapestry had met or exceeded the goals of its Accountability Plan outcome measure each year that it was applicable. Since its second year of operation, Tapestry had consistently outperformed the district on these exams by at least 30 percent. On the whole, the student achievement data the school collected during its first four years of operation indicated that the school had significantly improved student learning and achievement.

The Institute's Renewal Report noted that the school benefited from the strong leadership and vision of its founder and school leader, and that the varied backgrounds of the members of the school's board of trustees served the school well in general operational planning. The school's curriculum

was organized in a manner consistent with the school’s use of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB), emphasizing active and interdisciplinary learning and teaching. The school also successfully utilized internal evaluations of student work products and standardized test scores to assess the progress of students toward meeting the demands of New York State Performance Standards. Of particular note was the school’s “Work Sampling System,” an ongoing classroom performance system administered three times a year that is used to document students’ skills, knowledge, behavior, and achievements across the content areas. The Institute noted that the school’s seventh grade instructional program, while linked to the demands of state standards, had yet to rise to the consistent level of rigor demonstrated in earlier grades.

In its application for charter renewal, Tapestry Charter School requested approval to expand its Kindergarten through eighth grade program to include grades nine through twelve. The State University Trustees granted this request based on the recommendation of the Institute, and after the Institute had considered a variety of factors, including the strength of the initial plans for high school grades, the continuity in school leadership, the identification of an experienced and competent high school leader, the active working relationship between ELOB and the school, the support of the Gates Foundation, the school’s strong assessment outcomes, and the soundness of its fiscal and operational systems. At the time of the renewal report, Tapestry had provided a general outline of a high school curriculum using the state’s published performance standards, but had yet to present a scope and sequence or a curriculum adapted to meet the school’s mission and philosophy.

Evaluation Visit: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

General Overview

Although the inspection visit encompassed grades kindergarten through ten, it is important to note significant organizational and historical differences between the lower (kindergarten through eighth grades) and upper (ninth and tenth grades) grades. The high school grades were added in the second charter term, are currently housed in a building separate from the lower grades, and have a population which is more racially and socio-economically diverse than the lower school. Consequently, although there are many common threads linking the upper and lower academies—all grades at Tapestry espouse a common vision, are led by a single executive director and governed by a single Board of Directors—the two academies are in a variety of ways distinct from each other. Where it is relevant, specific distinctions are noted in the context of this report.

Assessment

At the high school level, the school is developing internal systems of assessment to track student progress and growth, and to inform instructional programming. Some teachers in the high school grades indicated that they are using previously administered copies of Regents exams to create internal assessments. There was also some evidence that the school had purchased electronic question banks for this purpose. The principal said that grant money from the Gates Foundation and ELOB has paid for the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) to administer map testing once a year which will measure students’ academic progress over time. As a result of initial NWEA testing, the principal said she has hired a certified English teacher to teach targeted literacy workshops to students with identified weaknesses. The principal also said this extra English teacher is working with the school to develop remedial programs for Saturdays and in the summer. Because these systems are still in development, it is unclear how they will influence instructional effectiveness and

student learning. As has been true throughout the life of the school, the elementary school continues to use a Work Sampling System to document students' skills, knowledge, behavior, and achievements across the content areas. This system has been used consistently over the terms of the two charter periods, and could potentially serve as a foundational component of a more comprehensive assessment program which includes formal and informal assessments.

The school has a portfolio system in place which is used by teachers and students to communicate to each other and parents about academic progress and growth. Inspectors observed student portfolios being used in both the high school and lower school grades. At the time of the visit, tenth graders were beginning to develop digital portfolios as part of their passage to eleventh grade. These students were able to demonstrate that their portfolios consisted of pieces that had been collected over multiple years. This portfolio system, including student-led conferences, seems to be meaningful for students and parents. Students interviewed indicated that they felt a real sense of accountability when they had to present their portfolios to their parents.

Curriculum

As was noted in the Institute's 2005 Renewal Report, Tapestry Charter School uses the New York State curriculum guidelines for all grade levels, and "teachers have freedom to adapt the curriculum guidelines in order to address the needs and interests of students." Evidence collected at the time of the visit suggests that the school continues to expect that individual teachers develop disciplinary curriculum for their own use.

The school has not yet developed a systematic way to ensure that all the standards are covered in every content area, or that instruction is consistent and seamless within and across grades. Few teachers reported being required to submit lesson plans to school leaders, and none reported receiving feedback on their planning. Several teachers were able to show inspectors discipline-specific curriculum documents (e.g. pacing guides, scope and sequence documents) for their respective courses. However, there was no common format or agreed upon content terms used within and across grades.

There did not seem to be an overarching set of school-specific curriculum documents to guide teachers in their planning. The school did not provide scope and sequence documents, pacing guides, or other curriculum documentation requested by school inspectors both prior to and during the school inspection visit. The documents that were provided as exemplars of the school's curriculum seemed to be units of study in an outline form, or lists of topics that a textbook might have as a table of contents.

Several teachers and members of the school's leadership team noted that the absence of comprehensive curriculum documents sometimes provided challenges for staff members. When asked how a teacher new to the school would know what to teach, one teacher responded, "Well, they better know the New York State documents. They should search their own soul for what's important." One member of the school's leadership team noted that not having common terminology across grades sometimes created confusion for students and teachers. "When we are looking at the reading and writing curriculum to see if we are missing some things...there is sometimes a breakdown because of language and terminology, for example, the "subject" in literature might be called "character" in another class. We need to be more consistent across grades." Inspectors found no evidence of a school-wide plan to ensure that the curriculum, as implemented, is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade-to-grade.

Students in the high school focus group praised the school for providing students with opportunities to learn about the “real world” in “hands on ways.” Students especially appreciated having opportunities to participate in enrichment field trips and activities throughout the school year, including projects with CEPA, a photography gallery downtown, Shea’s Performing Arts Theatre, and trips to see ballet performances. A list of cultural events and field trips for the K-8 program reflects a wide variety of field trips available to students in the lower school, including trips to museums, galleries, and dance performances. The school has also hosted a variety of visiting artists who have worked with students. School leaders, teachers, and students credited these and other opportunities with providing contexts for students to develop social skills as well as an appreciation for the arts. These two aspects support two of the school’s key design elements, an emphasis on the arts and a focus on family and community engagement.

Instructional Leadership

The school’s primary leadership team consists of an executive director who also serves as the principal of the lower school, an assistant principal of the lower school, and a principal of the high school grades. Other leadership positions include the arts coordinator, dean of students, and instructional guide. The school also relies on two external consultants from ELOB to critique and support instructional processes.

Leaders and teachers are highly committed to the school’s vision. This commitment is evident in the structural foundations of the school, including professional development planning and the master schedule. Teachers and leaders have a variety of opportunities to further develop their understanding of Expeditionary Learning, including attending national conferences and workshops and one-on-one support from two Expeditionary Learning consultants who are at the school on a weekly basis. Teachers and school leaders reported that Expeditionary Learning consultants frequently observed and coached teachers in the use of Expeditionary Learning methods. Additionally, the high school schedules time for students to work in “crew,” an Expeditionary Learning-inspired class that offers students academic support and provides a venue for students and teachers to work together on Expeditions. In interviews, leaders, teachers, and students expressed enthusiasm and interest in Expeditionary Learning processes and practices. The continuity of staff members seems to have contributed to the continuity of this vision over the school’s two charter periods. Several founders of the school, including the school’s executive director and several teachers, have been with the school since its first year of operation.

Although the school has had some continuity of staff members, at the time of the inspection visit, it did not have in place evaluation systems to ensure continuity of job performance. There was little evidence that school leaders had developed a comprehensive and ongoing system for evaluating and supporting teachers’ or administrators’ effectiveness and quality. Although teachers reported the common presence of administrative staff in their classrooms as “walkthroughs,” they could not identify specific feedback provided. Furthermore, there was little evidence of an effectively delivered and consistently applied evaluation plan for teachers. Although several teachers reported having been formally observed, the secondary teachers were unable to provide a common description of the professional evaluation program. The descriptions varied as to the number of anticipated and/or received formal evaluations, the procedures associated with formal observation, the necessary components of a good lesson (except for including the ELOB materials), or the importance of a lesson plan for review by the observer. At the administrative level, with the exception of the school’s executive director position, there were no evaluation procedures for school leaders or ELOB school consultants. In addition, job descriptions for leadership positions had yet to be written and

formalized, but the school had hired a human resources consultant earlier in the spring. This body of evidence suggests that the school's instructional program to date is built on implicit expectations and trust rather than explicit expectations and support.

High quality instruction

High quality instruction was not consistently evident throughout grades nine and ten. In some classrooms, quality instruction was occurring. In one classroom, for instance, the teacher led the students in focused, purposeful activities. The teacher provided a lesson that included a review of the previous night's homework, a brief period of re-teaching, an introduction of a new concept, in-class practice of the new concept, and initiation of the upcoming night's homework. Students were involved during most of the period. In many classes, however, teachers did not always clearly communicate expectations to students about what they must know and be able to do. For example, although "learning targets" were posted on classroom boards throughout the school, in several classrooms observed, the lesson did not clearly align with the learning targets. In the group activities that were present in many classes, including crew, it was not evident that there were clearly delineated responsibilities and accountability for tasks. As a result, students were commonly off-task during group activities, resulting in a loss of instructional time. Some classrooms were heavily worksheet-based, where students completed teacher-designed worksheets, and the teacher supervised by walking around and reviewing the packet with the students. It was not clear to observers that the worksheet-driven instruction fully engaged students in challenging tasks requiring students to use problem solving skills.

At-risk Students

At the high school level, the school is developing structures and processes to support students at risk of failing. This includes hiring an extra literacy teacher, in-school and after school tutors, and scheduling times for remediation during Academic Support periods (AS), on Saturdays and during "intensive weeks" at the end of each trimester. The school's principal said that she hired an additional literacy teacher to provide literacy workshops to struggling students. She said that she identified students with weaknesses in specific literacy skills through analyzing NWEA test results. The literacy teacher, hired in February, has been designing and delivering workshops targeted to students' weak areas. She said that tutors from Canisius College provide support in literacy, mathematics, and Spanish after school and sometimes during AS. Students and staff members described 'intensive weeks' as providing an opportunity for students who have not met their learning targets to revise work or to retake tests. Students in the focus group spoke positively about this remediation model. One student said, "They don't make it boring. It's fun to stay back [for tutoring], and they don't make you work the whole time." For students who do not need remediation, intensive weeks provide time for enrichment activities, trips, and programs. The school has yet to document the effectiveness of these newly implemented structures.

Limited evidence collected at the elementary level suggests that remediation efforts take place during the school day, and consist of a combination of pull-out and push-in from special educators and/or the reading specialists.

Student order and discipline

Students across Tapestry demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in social and presentation skills, including greeting, communication, and eye contact. Throughout the visit, students at the elementary

and high school levels warmly greeted inspection team members and introduced themselves by shaking hands and maintaining eye contact. Students in high school grades who met with inspection team members in a focus group were highly articulate and clearly comfortable speaking to outsiders about their school. Teachers and students credited the school's instructional program, including end-of-expedition presentations, field trips, community programs and student-led portfolio conferences, with supporting students' development of these social skills. This emphasis on students' social skills supports one of the school's key design elements to foster community engagement.

In the high school grades, the school's code of conduct is not consistently enforced, and many teachers tolerate a low level of misbehavior. The general level of tolerated misbehavior tended to be particularly high in crew classes. The behaviors observed by inspectors included: wandering about the room, throwing paper airplanes, talking back to the adult, horseplay, leaving the room and returning after an inordinate amount of time, and sleeping. Given the centrality of crew to the success of the ELOB program, these issues may negatively impact the overall instructional program.

Due to the unavailability of teachers at the time of the visit, inspectors were unable to observe discipline within and across K-8 classrooms. However, some teachers said they struggled with how to bridge a number of student behavior systems in the K-8 building. One teacher stated, "It's really hard to have a common set of expectations when all of the teachers are doing different management strategies."

Professional development

In interviews and conversations, the professional staff of Tapestry generally conveyed a strong belief that the Expeditionary Learning related professional development opportunities are aligned with the school's priorities and are of high quality. Professional development opportunities included ELOB Conferences and ongoing support from two school designers from ELOB. Teachers reported that the conferences helped them visualize the expeditionary learning model. One teacher described the ELOB High School Institute as "mind-blowing PD," and another commented "for the first time in a while I was the student. They taught us using the ELOB model that we are expected to use in our classrooms." Two ELOB school consultants are in the school once a week to meet with and observe high school teachers. Interviews with teachers and a review of sample observation reports indicate that teacher observations are focused on general pedagogical skills as well as ELOB tenets and expectations. Several teachers at the lower school expressed a need for the type of coaching provided by ELOB school consultants at the high school. The school designers also provided school-wide professional development sessions on developing expeditions, thematic instruction, and interdisciplinary teaching and planning. Teachers generally perceived these sessions as informative and useful.

Teachers said they appreciated the weekly and ongoing professional development meetings that allowed for interactions with colleagues. During this time, teachers said they had time to collaborate on lesson planning and making interdisciplinary connections. These meaningful collaborations among teachers have been reported throughout the life of the school.

As was true at the time of the renewal visit, school leaders reported frequently looking at student work and talking to students to assess the quality of the instructional program and to get a "pulse" for how teachers were performing. The school's executive director stated, "I hear kids, talk with kids. I look at students' performance pieces and examples of student work...I know they [students] are learning because they have an interest in hearing speakers."

At the time of the school visit, the school had yet to develop a systematic way to identify instructional weaknesses and teacher interests as part of a professional development needs assessment. None of the secondary teachers interviewed reported knowledge of a staff survey or interest inventory with respect to professional development needs.

Governance

Tapestry benefits from a strong board of trustees that is committed to the vision of the school.

The board has been working to construct a new building to house both the upper and lower grades in one facility. Board members, echoing other Tapestry staff members, rightly expressed concerns about the current plan to consolidate the two buildings into one by 2010. Concerns included maintaining enrollment at the elementary school level, building positive social networks across the two schools, particularly among students of different ages, races, and classes, and maintaining strong parental participation and support across grade levels. Board members stated that the school leaders are in the process of developing a transition plan to address these concerns.

As was true at the time of the renewal visit, the board of trustees evaluates the school director on an annual basis, reviewing her educational, organizational, and financial leadership. The board uses a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate the school's academic performance. Board members frequently visit the school, observing meetings, classrooms, and school functions.

Several board members are involved in the process of developing programs to support a professional development school partnership with Canisius College, which would include a mentoring program, self-study program, and teacher training programs. This partnership would support the school's intent to maintain community engagement and ongoing professional development for staff members.

Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Annual Inspection Visit at Tapestry Charter School on May 13 – 14, 2008. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Joanne Falinski, Ph.D. (Team Leader), was Vice President for Charter School Evaluation at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Prior to joining the Institute, Dr. Falinski served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Pace University, Pleasantville, NY. Her responsibilities included teaching both undergraduate and graduate education courses, supervising literacy practicum students in the field and conducting relevant research. She also presented at numerous regional and national conferences on topics of literacy, professional development and collaboration between special education and regular education. Dr. Falinski was actively involved in the University community, serving as a member of the Institutional Review Board and Writing Center Advisory Board. Prior to joining Pace, Dr. Falinski served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education for Manhattanville College and Director of a NYS site of the National Writing Project. Dr. Falinski's vast experience in the K-12 community includes serving as an Elementary Classroom Teacher and Elementary Principal.

Jason L. Sarsfield was a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute at the State University of New York. Mr. Sarsfield fulfilled a leadership role in informal and annual visits to SUNY authorized charter schools as well as participated in the charter renewal review process, provided technical assistance to schools as needed, and contributed to the Institute's research agenda. Prior to joining the Institute in January, 2007 Mr. Sarsfield was a Contract Analyst at The Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University – Office of Academic Accountability where he was responsible for evaluating the academic performance of authorized schools, reviewing school curricula and educational programs, and measuring progress toward educational goals. While at Central Michigan University, Mr. Sarsfield worked closely with the Michigan Department of Education on annual legislative reports, grant reviews, and policy recommendations. Previously, Mr. Sarsfield taught social studies in grades 7-12 in Michigan and Alaska while also completing curriculum development responsibilities and serving as an Advanced Placement Exam Reader for The College Board. Mr. Sarsfield holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan University and is completing the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University

Kim Wechtenhiser was Associate Vice President of the Charters Schools Institute at the State University of New York. Ms. Wechtenhiser had primary responsibility for the Institute's charter renewal process; overseeing a comprehensive evaluation of each SUNY authorized charter school as it comes up for renewal. Ms. Wechtenhiser joined the Institute in September 2005 as a Senior Analyst. Prior to her work with the Institute, Ms. Wechtenhiser served as the Coordinator of New Schools Development in the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts Department of Education, where she led the review of new charter school applications, provided technical assistance to newly chartered schools, participated in the ongoing review of their academic and organizational performance, and oversaw the charter amendment process. Ms. Wechtenhiser is the former Lead Teacher of Spanish at City on a hill Charter Public School in Boston, where she also served as faculty representative to the school's Board of Trustees. She taught Spanish at Westfield Public High School and English at the Universidad de Córdoba in Spain. Ms. Wechtenhiser holds a B.A. in Spanish and Secondary Education and an M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature from Simmons College. She earned an Ed.M. in School Leadership from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

In addition, the Institute was pleased to have the following consultant(s) join the school visit team:

Corinne McKamey, Ed.D. (Consulting Writer), is an independent educational consultant and has experiences across many facets of education. For the past 15 years, she has worked in a variety of roles in urban public schools, including science teacher; curriculum developer; school developer; teacher educator; and school evaluator. As a teacher education clinical faculty member at Trinity and Harvard Universities, she has served as a mentor teacher, university supervisor, and curriculum developer. Corinne currently works as a researcher for the Success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics project at the Wellesley Center for Women. She has also been a research assistant for several other university research projects, including Project ASSERT (Assessing Strengths and Supporting Affective Resistance in Teaching), Harvard PACE (Projects in Active Cultural Engagement). She was a co-chair of the Harvard Educational Review, and has published several articles and a book entitled, *To be a teacher: Voices from the classroom* (1995). Her dissertation focused on aspects of caring learning communities in a high school serving a diverse immigrant population. Dr. McKamey received a Bachelor of Science degree from Cornell University, and a Doctor of Education degree from Harvard University.

Joe Nicolella has more than thirty years in the field of education. At the time of his retirement, Mr. Nicolella was the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources of the Shenendehowa Central School District, and as such his responsibilities included developing and maintaining all staff rosters and procedures for a district of over 1,700 employees; providing leadership and supervision for the district's professional development program; recruiting, selecting and hiring staff; coordinating the development of the district's teacher assessment and evaluation approach; and conducting disciplinary and other hearings, as well as contract negotiations. Prior to becoming Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Nicolella served as a principal at the junior high and middle school level for six years, as director of student services for three years, as an assistant principal for ten years, and as a science teacher at the middle and high school levels for over ten years. Since retirement from public education, Mr. Nicolella has served in the capacity of a supervisor of administrative interns and student teachers at the College of St. Rose, as an interim coordinator of special education, and as acting lead principal for three middle schools. For nearly three years, he also has been a consultant for the Charter Schools Institute, with a primary responsibility to review and critique curriculum documents submitted to the Institute as a part of the initial charter school application process, charter renewal, or change in program. Mr. Nicolella has earned both a Bachelor and Master of Science degree in Education. He also holds a Master of Science in Advanced Classroom Teaching and a Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction. Mr. Nicolella has also completed all coursework for a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. All of his professional training was completed at the University at Albany.

APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?	
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1	English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.2	Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.3	Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.4	Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.5	NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data	1B	The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.
Benchmark 1C Curriculum	1C	The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

Benchmark 1D Pedagogy	1D.1	The school has strong instructional leadership.
	1D.2	High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.
	1D.3	The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.
Benchmark 1E Student Order & Discipline	1E	The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.
Benchmark 1F Professional Development	1F	The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?	
Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.

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 inspection report, which all schools in that position receive. As such, each of the Institute's inspection 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 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. This subset, State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks 1B-1F, is often referred to as the "Qualitative Education Benchmarks," or "QEBs." In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the QEBs are 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.²

Over time, and particularly at 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 Qualitative Education 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).

² 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.

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 University 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 inspection 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 inspection 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.