



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

External Evaluation Report of UFT Charter School

2007 – 2008

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UFT Charter School **External Evaluation Report**

I. INTRODUCTION

The external inspection is part of a comprehensive oversight and evaluation system for those charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“State University Trustees”). The external inspection during the second or third year of a school’s initial five-year charter cycle and periodically thereafter provides an independent assessment of the school’s progress toward meeting the academic and, on a more limited basis, organizational Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a component of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (“State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks”).¹

The external inspection complements the regular reviews conducted by the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) by incorporating the Institute’s documentation of the school’s previous record of performance. This report provides an analysis of the data reviewed before and during the inspection visit and reflects any trends evident therein. In addition, this assessment provides insights which may contribute to the school’s ongoing improvement efforts and support the school’s case when it applies for initial or subsequent charter renewal. Finally, the Institute uses external inspection reports in discussions with school boards about the quality of their schools’ educational programs and the schools’ prospects for charter renewal.

This report is organized in the following sections:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Conduct of the Visit**
- III. School Description**
- IV. Executive Summary**
- V. School Progress Report**
- VI. Overall Trends Regarding the School**

Section I - the “Introduction” provides an overview of the external inspection process, as well as an overview of the organization of this report. Section II - the “Conduct of the Visit” includes a list of the members of the site visit team and their biographical sketches, along with a synopsis of the documents reviewed in preparation for the visit. Section III - the “School Description,” as the title indicates, briefly describes the charter school in terms of its establishment and history. Section IV - the “Executive Summary” provides a summary of the major conclusions reflected in the report.

Section V, entitled the “School Progress Report,” is divided into two parts: Part I, the “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” and Part II, the “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability.” Both parts of the School Progress Report reflect evidence and analysis of the school’s effectiveness in meeting the standards set out in selected QEBs of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks.

¹ A full description of the State University Trustees’ Renewal Benchmarks and *Practices, Policies, and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* can be found at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org>.

The “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” is further divided into two components: the “School Performance Review,” which provides an analysis of student academic performance for the most recent two or three years as an indication of the school’s academic success (Renewal Benchmark 1A), and the “School Educational Program Review,” which reflects the visit team’s analysis of the qualitative aspects of the school’s educational program based upon the guiding questions provided by the Institute and aligned with Renewal Benchmarks 1B - 1F.

“Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability,” focuses on three components: clarity of the school’s mission and vision to its stakeholders; parent and student satisfaction; and the establishment of systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school’s instructional program. Renewal Benchmarks 2B, 2D.1, and 2C.1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

In the final section of the External Visit report, Section VI - “Overall Trends Regarding the School,” the visit team offers its insights about any patterns that have emerged across the full spectrum of the school. Here the team offers its judgments about the school’s effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 as amended (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

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

The judgments of the team are organized into two categories: academic program and organizational viability. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in Appendix A. For your reference, the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, in their entirety, may be found on the Institute’s website at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the UFT Charter School was conducted on May 5 and 6, 2008 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA. The team included:

- Spencer Blasdale, Chief Executive Officer of SchoolWorks. Before joining SchoolWorks, he was a founder and the Executive Director of the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter Public School in Boston, Massachusetts. He has spent the past 20 years in the field of education as a teacher, administrator and non-profit director. Spencer holds a BA in history from Princeton University and an M.Ed. from Harvard University.
- Cecelia D. Brady, Executive Leadership Coach with the District of Columbia New Leaders for New Schools program and a SchoolWorks consultant. Previously she had a 33-year career as a teacher, counselor, assistant principal and principal in the DC Public Schools. She holds degrees from DVC Teachers College, Bowie State and Trinity College.
- Susan Jamback, Team Leader, a consultant for SchoolWorks. Previous experience includes serving as principal in four public elementary and middle schools and as director of two charter schools in Massachusetts. She has mentored charter and district principals and conducted comprehensive charter and district school evaluations. She holds a BS from Plymouth University and M.Ed. from Antioch.
- Carlton Jordan, consultant with SchoolWorks and an independent educational consultant. Formerly, he was a Senior Associate with the Education Trust and founding member of Renaissance Middle School in Montclair, NJ. Carlton holds a BA in economics and an MA in education from the State University of New York at Albany.
- Zita M Samuels, Team Writer, consultant with SchoolWorks, and an independent grant writer and school/program evaluator. Formerly, she was a teacher and program administrator in the public schools of Somerville, MA. She holds degrees from Rutgers (AB), Harvard (EdM), and Boston Universities (CAGS).
- Karl Smith, Ed.D., Project Associate with SchoolWorks. Previously, he was a middle school principal and an Adjunct Professor at Lesley University. He holds degrees from Ottawa University, Boston State College, Bridgewater State College and an Ed.D. from Boston University.

As noted above, the team used the QEBs, a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, as the guides for its evaluation. In addition, the team relied on a set of framework questions to structure the “School Progress Report” section of this document. Prior to the two-day visit, the team reviewed the school’s documents, including its annual *Accountability Plan Progress Report*, reports from previous site visits by the Charter Schools Institute or other entities, such as the New York State Education Department, and relevant sections of the school’s charter agreement. During the visit, the team observed classes, reviewed student work, interviewed school administrators, school board members, staff, parents and students, and reviewed curriculum and other documents to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the charter of UFT Elementary Charter School on July 15, 2005, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on July 21, 2005. The school opened in August, 2005 at 300 Wyona Street in Brooklyn, New York, with an initial enrollment of 138 students in Kindergarten and first grades.

The founding group of this school initially submitted applications to the State University Trustees to establish two charter schools: the UFT Elementary Academy, which would serve students in grades K-5; and the UFT Secondary Academy, which would serve students in grades 6-9. At the time, in part because available charters were limited, the Charter Schools Institute recommended that the group move forward with the submission of a single application for the UFT Elementary Academy noting that the option to later request a revision to the charter to add secondary grades was possible and in fact, common practice among existing SUNY authorized charter schools.

Through an approved revision to its charter in March, 2006, the school changed its name to UFT Charter School and received approval to ultimately add sixth through ninth grades. Under the terms of the revision, UFT Charter School opened a second facility in September, 2006, located at 800 Van Siclen Avenue in Brooklyn, to serve its sixth through ninth grade students. The school plans to add one upper level grade, and one elementary grade, each year through the term of its initial charter. In 2007-08, UFT Charter School enrolled 547 students in Kindergarten through third grades at the Elementary Academy and sixth and seventh grades at the Secondary Academy. It remains a goal of the UFT Charter School leadership team to demonstrate that middle school students can achieve academic excellence, regardless of their elementary school education, i.e., the Elementary Academy will not serve as a bridge to the Secondary Academy for two more years.

As of the date of the current school inspection, the UFT Charter School Board of Trustees consisted of the following individuals:

- Ms. Randi Weingarten, Chairperson;
- Ms. Ana Aguire;
- Ms. Gigi Georges;
- Mr. Jeffrey Leads;
- Ms. Bertha Lewis;
- Ms. Rita Danis (elementary principal);
- Mr. Drew Goodman (secondary principal);
- Ms. Melissa J. Klein;
- Ms. Tara Shaleesh;
- Mr. Augustin Edobor – Osula;
- Ms. Adreinne Jones;
- Ms. Michelle Bodden; and
- Ms. Evelyn DeJesus.

The mission statement for UFT Elementary Charter School in the initial application was as follows:

The UFT Elementary Charter School will prepare all students to achieve academic and personal excellence. The UFT Elementary Charter School will graduate students fully prepared for a demanding secondary education and help prepare students for meaningful lives as full democratic citizens in a free society.

However, with the name change and planned upward expansion of grades offered, the UFT Charter School revised its mission to the following:

The UFT Charter School will prepare all students to achieve academic and personal excellence. The Elementary Academy of the UFT Charter School will graduate students fully prepared for a demanding secondary education. The Secondary Academy of the UFT Charter School will graduate students fully prepared for a demanding college education. Both academies will help to prepare students for meaningful lives as full democratic citizens in a free society.

The school partners with the United Federation of Teachers Educational Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization that directly supports the school, as well as provides support through its Educational Foundation. The partner organization serves the school as a consultant, service provider, and financial supporter. Ongoing support services are provided on an in-kind basis and include: financial planning and management; procurement; human resources; grants administration; service bureau (through UFT Welfare Fund); website and email technology; fund and relationship development; meeting space; and financial support.

The founders of the UFT Charter School are committed to closing the achievement gap and creating a school “built on democratic principles of respect, tolerance, and liberty so that students will also become practitioners of democracy and civic responsibility.” They also see the school as exemplifying the original vision of a charter school model as conceived by Albert Shanker, former United Federation of Teachers and American Federation of Teachers President, which includes a collaborative labor-management relationship that respects teachers’ voices. The Executive Summary of the initial charter for the UFT Charter School states that the school will achieve its mission through the following key design elements:

- balancing human resources with curriculum and school culture;
- high-quality teachers (gained by economic and material incentives);
- democratic governance;
- professional development;
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification;
- three parent seats on school board of trustees;
- family-school partnership;
- CREST core values (community, respect, excellence, scholarship, trustworthiness);
- a dress code;
- high academic expectations;
- academic-based after school program (run by a community based organization);

- two teachers per classroom in Kindergarten through third grades;
- intensive focus on literacy, numeracy, and early intervention; and
- “Habits for Thought” (Analysis, Breadth of perspective, Connection, Discourse, and Evidence).

School Year (2007-08)

Minimum of 180 Instructional Days

School Day (2007-08)

Elementary Academy: 8:30 a.m. - 2:40 p.m. (extended-day program runs until 5 p.m.)

Secondary Academy: 8:00 a.m. - 3:45 p.m. (after-school clubs meet until 5 p.m.)

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ²	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2005-06	150	150	138	K-1	K-1	K-1	YES
2006-07	225	350	355	K-2	K-2, 6	K-2, 6	YES
2007-08	300	525		K-3	K-3, 6-7		
2008-09	375	735		K-4	K-4, 6-8		
2009-10	450	860		K-5	K-9		

Race/Ethnicity	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0 %	1.0 %	NA	NA
Black or African American	86.0 %	53.0 %	NA	NA
Hispanic	13.0 %	40.0 %	NA	NA
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.0 %	5.0 %	NA	NA
White	1.0 %	1.0 %	NA	NA

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

² 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.

Special Populations	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19
Students with Disabilities	NA	NA	6.2 %	13.3 %
Limited English Proficient	0.0 %	12.0 %	0.8 %	11.7 %

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

Free/Reduced Lunch	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19	% of Enroll. UFT Charter	% of Enroll. CSD #19
Eligible for Free Lunch	62.0 %	86.0 %	63.4 %	81.8 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	17.0 %	5.0 %	16.6 %	5.4 %

Source: 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
Original Charter – 1st Year	2005-06	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	Granted request to change school name and add grade 6 for 2006-07
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2006-07	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	NONE
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2007-08	3 rd	YES	External School Evaluation Report	NONE

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UFT charter school has implemented many elements of its fundamental design, but several have yet to consistently take hold. There are solid support structures for both teachers and students at the school, and the CREST values are visibly in evidence throughout the school. Although implemented to varying degrees throughout the Elementary and Secondary academies, the school has created a curriculum and coherent assessment system. While curriculum and support structures are defined, the school has yet to realize a culture of high expectations across grades and the two academies.

Support for teachers and struggling students is a strength of the UFT Charter School. Professional development is well-resourced and addresses a variety of school and teacher needs. The Teacher Center provides ongoing and beneficial support to many new teachers at each campus. Programs to support students at risk are also clearly evident at the UFT Charter School. Such interventions are comprised of the school's inclusion model, academic remediation during the extended day, and a summer program for struggling students in the secondary academy. The effectiveness of these programs has not been measured.

The school has created curriculum documents that reflect state standards and performance indicators. There are a variety of assessments used for curriculum planning as well as for remediation and progress monitoring at the UFT Charter School. The use of assessment data, however, is different at each academy with the newer secondary academy in earlier stages of development. The school has not yet developed a fully refined data culture and practice of using assessment reflectively to determine what assessment practices are most effective.

Although elements of strong instructional leadership are present in both the elementary and secondary academies, there is not a pervasive culture of high expectations and excellence. Instruction and classroom management varies from classroom to classroom. In fact, classroom management and transitions were an issue in one quarter of the classes observed, with the secondary grades struggling more than the elementary grades. The school's written documents, while thoughtful and intentional in terms of designing a learning environment and school culture, were not consistently implemented across the two academies.

The school's governance structure provides teachers and parents with representation on the board and several individuals indicated that their "voice is heard." While Stakeholders in the UFT community are clear on the overall college mission of the school, the inspection team had questions about the governance structure. Due to miscommunication, only five board members were available for the focus group interview. From this sample, the inspection team had concerns about the implementation of the structure, including the fact that the role of the UFT as partner was not clearly understood by this group. The team concluded that the board lacks several practices of good governance, including training its own members and evaluating school leaders.

V. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

Part 1. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success

A. School Performance Review

(The following analysis is based on the 2006-07 performance data that was available at the time of the visit.)

Performance Summary: The UFT Charter School administered the state assessments for the first time in 2006-07 to sixth graders who had only been enrolled for a short period of time. With only one year of test data, the majority of the measures in the school's Accountability Plan did not yet apply; only two of the five outcome measures that constitute the English language arts and mathematics goals could be evaluated. Based on the limited data for the sixth grade, the school did not meet its English language arts or mathematics goals. It had not yet enrolled 4th, 5th or 8th grade students, so its science and social studies goals could not be evaluated. The school is deemed to be in good standing under the state's NCLB accountability system.

English language arts: At the time of the inspection visit, the UFT Charter School did not meet its English language arts goal, though the data are based only on students who had been enrolled for four months prior to taking the state examination. The absolute measure based on the state exam did not apply until the 2007-08 school year, but results indicate 46 percent of incoming 6th grade students scored at the proficient level on the state exam, well below the 75 percent target. UFT did exceed the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system, and outperformed the local school district. In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, the school performed worse than predicted.

Though not included in its Accountability plan, UFT administers a number of other standardized tests, especially to the elementary academy. At the end of 2006-07, 72 percent of 1st grade students and 66 percent of 2nd grade students were at the proficient level on the Terra Nova exam. However, 2nd grade cohort results indicated a decline from the previous year. The school also administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to students in kindergarten through 2nd grade. On the spring administration, most kindergarten and 1st grade students were at the benchmark for their respective grades. The school also administered the Writing and Reading Assessment Profile (WRAP) and found at the end of the year that most students in each of the three grades exceeded the test's benchmark criteria. It is not yet clear how well results from these tests will predict performance on the 2007-08 state exams.

Mathematics: Based on limited data, the school did not meet its mathematics goal. On the state exam, 62 percent of 6th grade students scored at the proficient level. UFT exceeded the AMO, and performed slightly better than the local school district. In comparison to demographically similar public schools state-wide, the school performed about the same as predicted. Because the school administered the state examination for the first time in 2006-07, the growth measure cannot be evaluated.

On the Terra Nova exam, a majority of 1st and 2nd grade students scored at the proficient level; however, the 2nd grade cohort's performance declined from the previous year. UFT also indicated that based on results from Everyday Math assessments and teacher observations, a large majority of students "met or exceeded grade level standards as reported on end of term report cards." It remains

to be seen how well these assessments will predict performance on the 2007-08 administration of state exams.

Science: UFT did not yet enroll 4th or 8th grade students, so its science goals could not be evaluated for the 2007-08 school year.

Social Studies: UFT did not yet enroll 5th or 8th grade students, so its social studies goals could not be evaluated for the 2007-08 school year.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Based on 2006-07 performance data, the school was deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts

UFT Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: None		2005-06 Grades Served: K-1		2006-07 Grades Served: K-2, 6		MET
	Grades	All Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	Grades	All 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	(0)	3	(0)	3	(0)	MET
	8	(0)	4	(0)	4	(0)	
	All	(0)	5	(0)	5	(0)	
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.	4	(0)	6	(0)	6	46.0 (126)	MET
	8	(0)	7	(0)	7	(0)	
	All	(0)	8	(0)	8	(0)	
<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.	Grades	PI	Grades	PI	Grades	PI	Comparison: (Brooklyn District 19)
	4	AMO	NA	AMO	6	144	
	8	AMO	NA	AMO	122	122	
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	Grades	Actual	Grades	Actual	Comparison: (Brooklyn District 19)
	4	Predicted	NA	Predicted	6	46.0	
	8	Effect Size	NA	Effect Size	36.2	36.2	
<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 NYSTP. An asterisk indicates cohort met target.	Grades	Actual	Grades	Actual	% FL	Actual	Assessment: NYSTP
	4	Predicted	NA	Predicted	63.4	46.0	
	8	Effect Size	NA	Effect Size	49.8	-0.22	
	Grades	Cohorts Making Target	Grades	Cohorts Making Target	Gr	N	Assessment: NYSTP
	4	of	4	of	Base	Target	
	8	Result	8	Result	Result	Result	
	All	Result	All	Result	All	Result	

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

UFT Charter School

	2004-05 Grades Served: None	2005-06 Grades Served: K-1	2006-07 Grades Served: K-2, 6	MET	
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 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.	Grades	All Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	Grades	
	4	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	3	
	8	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	4	
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	All Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	5	
	4	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	6	
	8	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	7	
COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Grades	All Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	8	
	4	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	All	
	8	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	Grades	
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	All Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	Grades	
	4	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	6	
	8	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	Comparison: (Brooklyn District 19)	
VALUE ADDED MEASURE 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 asterisk indicates cohort met target.	Grades	All Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	Grades	
	4	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	6	
	8	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	Comparison: (Brooklyn District 19)	
Assessment:		Assessment: NYSTP		Assessment: NYSTP	
Grades Cohorts Making Target		Grades Cohorts Making Target		Gr N Base Target Result	
N Base Target Result		N Base Target Result		Gr N Base Target Result	
Effect Size		Effect Size		Effect Size	
Actual Predicted		Actual Predicted		Actual Predicted	
63.4 61.5		63.4 61.5		63.4 61.5	
0.03		0.03		0.03	
NO		NO		NO	
--		--		--	
AMO		AMO		AMO	
154		154		154	
86		86		86	
YES		YES		YES	
-		-		-	
-		-		-	

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

B. “School Educational Program Review”

Benchmark 1B: The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.

There are a variety of assessments used for remediation and progress monitoring at the UFT Charter School; however, the use of assessment data is different at the elementary and secondary levels.

The New York State Assessments in English language arts and mathematics were administered to students in grade 3. The 2007-08 results were not yet available at the time of the inspection visit, making it impossible to note how the data would be used. The New York State assessments were administered to last year’s grade 6 cohort and, again, this year in grades 6 and 7. Data from last year’s state assessment has been used at the secondary academy to target students for academic intervention services and classroom accommodations during the school day as well as for after-school extended time instruction. Modifications for individual students were noted in some teachers’ lesson plans.

The TerraNova, a norm-referenced, standardized achievement test that assesses students in English language arts and mathematics, is administered to students in grade 1 and above twice each year in the fall and spring, providing both formative and summative results. Test results from the TerraNova exam have been used to help inform promotion decisions and to determine what students have learned, as well as to differentiate and establish groupings for continued instruction and identification of students who may need Academic Intervention Services. According to the school’s Accountability Plan Progress Report, TerraNova results have also been used to help determine what needs to be taught to enable students to succeed on this assessment. Teachers at the secondary level reported that flexible grouping in their classrooms is based to some extent on the item analyses provided with TerraNova results.

There are several commercial assessments that are unique to the elementary grades. All students in kindergarten through 3rd grades are administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a research-based standardized assessment, four times a year to establish a baseline for each student, as well as progress monitoring at two interim checkpoints during the year for at-risk students. This set of short (one-minute) measures focus on four major areas of early literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension. DIBELS data are used to divide students into literacy groups for benchmark (on level), strategic (somewhat below level) or intensive (significantly below level) instructional support. For students at the strategic and intensive levels, additional progress monitoring occurs with further administrations of the assessment to track student growth in literacy. Teachers can assess students in minutes to measure the development of pre-reading and early reading skills, which informs the next six to eight weeks of instruction. Results are used to adjust student groupings in kindergarten through 3rd grades and to re-teach in areas in which students are struggling.

The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is administered across elementary grade levels at four intervals throughout the year. This assessment system documents student progress in the classroom and provides ways to match students’ instructional and independent reading abilities with classroom instructional materials. It is also used by teachers to identify student groupings for instruction, including intervention where required. Both the DIBELS and Fountas &

Pinnell will be administered in June as summative assessments of student literacy progress in kindergarten through 3rd grades.

In mathematics, kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers use the mCLASS assessment three times each year, which assesses student proficiency and mathematical thinking to help determine their understanding of concepts of numeracy and areas for remediation. Teachers use handheld software to conduct the assessments quickly and efficiently. According to the elementary principal and teacher focus groups, results inform instructional strategies and student grouping.

According to the UFT Charter School Accountability Plan Progress Report (July 2007), teachers created alternate assessments in science and social studies that were administered in the spring of 2007 as a way to summatively determine student progress in the content areas. These assessments were based on the New York State standards and units of study covered in classrooms. Students were graded on a rating scale of one to four, to be consistent with the state assessment system. This rubric is also used for grading student assignments and for report cards, where students are graded for both academics and behavior. Student work graded according to this rubric was seen posted in hallways and classrooms. In looking at a sample of rubrics, the inspection team found that these rubrics are often generic checklists that lack high standards and quality indicators. In some instances, if an element called for in a rubric (such as 'include two facts') is present in a piece of student work, it is counted, but the quality of the element or response is not assessed. The team was unable to determine, however, the extent to which all classroom teachers were using similar rubrics.

In addition to the formal assessments, teachers use chapter and unit tests in the selected textbooks; workbook pages; homework; informal assessments and quizzes on lesson objectives; various classroom assignments and projects; and, writing prompts and other informal testing measures to track progress. The use of rubrics was noted on some student work, mostly in English language arts and social studies, posted on bulletin boards. The use of rubrics, however, is not uniform throughout both the elementary and secondary academy, but rather used at a teacher's discretion. Information from these assessments is used to determine grades on report cards, which are issued every six weeks. In some instances, the teacher-made classroom assessments examined by the inspection team showed a lack of rigor. For example, some teacher-made assessments tested students' knowledge and comprehension only and did not require students to demonstrate ability to apply skills or knowledge.

Assessment results are used for a variety of purposes. They serve as a source of information to refer students to the after-school program (Academic Excellence at the elementary level and extended day at the secondary level) and to the Pupil Personnel Committees. Teachers also use their own assessments to determine how students are progressing through the curriculum on a daily basis. Although assessment results are used to group students within classrooms, classroom groups (such as a typical third grade classroom) are heterogeneous within each grade, with the exception of mathematics at the secondary academy. At the elementary academy, teachers are expected to use assessment results to continually regroup students for instruction and target individual students' learning needs.

The use of assessment data in the elementary academy is more targeted toward improving instruction and supporting individual students. The secondary academy is developing ways to use the data, but much of the current work is left to individual teacher discretion. The school has not yet developed a

fully-refined data culture and practice of using assessment reflectively to determine what assessment practices are most effective.

Benchmark 1C: The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

UFT Charter School has curriculum documents that reflect state standards and performance indicators. Curriculum is at various stages of development. The curriculum documents at the elementary academy include binders of lesson plans and units of study for content areas (social studies, science and writing) for each grade level currently enrolled, and research-based texts for reading and mathematics. At the secondary academy, leadership indicated that the teachers use the New York City scope and sequence and pacing guide, as well as teacher-developed curricula in content areas that have been developed during summer workshops. As related in focus groups, at each academy teachers are aware of the state standards and performance indicators that inform the development of curriculum and determine the knowledge and skills that students are expected to achieve.

The comprehensive elementary curriculum binders in social studies, science and writing contain units and lesson plans that were developed by teachers during the summer and in weekly professional development meetings that are guided by the UFT-supported Teacher Center specialist. The content of these lesson plans has generally been tied to the state standards and performance indicators, as shown in the Curriculum Crosswalk binder that was developed to demonstrate the alignment of the individual lesson plans with the standards. For example, a science unit for grade 1 on Living and Non-Living Things contained 17 lessons, including opportunities for review and assessment. In the areas of reading and mathematics, however, teachers rely on the New York City-adopted texts for curriculum (Harcourt Trophies for reading and Everyday Mathematics for mathematics). Teachers were observed using Teachers' Editions of these texts during instruction. Lesson plans and assessment results are available to all teachers electronically at the elementary academy on the shared T-Drive.

At the secondary academy, well-developed curriculum units were in evidence. Lesson plans are based on these curriculum units. Teachers interviewed reported that they were provided a curriculum based on state standards with a pacing calendar and interdisciplinary content organized around thematic units. Teachers also worked during the summer with the Teacher Center specialist and content area experts to develop curricula using the Understanding by Design process. A curriculum committee meets monthly during the school year to continually review and improve curriculum. For social studies, the text used is the History Alive series, published by Teachers Curriculum Institute and, in science, the Prentice Hall Science Explorer series is used.

There has not yet been a vertical alignment between the elementary and secondary curricula, partly because curriculum is developing, as needed, and there is still a gap in the grade levels being served: kindergarten through 3rd grade at the elementary academy and 6th and 7th grades at the secondary academy, to date. Overall, however, although many resources, curriculum programs and supplemental materials are in evidence, it was not clear at either level that the lesson plan binders and the adopted texts have been sufficiently aligned to determine that all the state standards and related performance indicators are being covered. There are no formal internal benchmarks to actually assess the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Benchmark 1D.1: The school has strong instructional leadership.

Although elements of strong instructional leadership are present, there is not a pervasive culture of high expectations and excellence. Much of the support for instruction comes from full-time on-site Teacher Center specialists who collaborate with school leaders on instructional leadership. The Teacher Center specialists provide professional development for all teachers as well as coaching and mentoring for new teachers through weekly observations and one-on-one meetings. At both the elementary and secondary academies, a Teacher Center specialist is part of the leadership team and teachers, particularly new teachers, view them as instructional leaders.

The school leaders conduct the formal observation process, which consists of a pre-conference to determine a focus for the observation, the observation itself, and a post-conference following the observation. Veteran teachers have two formal observations annually. For new teachers, there are three formal observations. There are five broad categories for teacher evaluation: Commitment to Students and Student Learning; Knowledge of Curriculum and Instructional Strategies; Manage and Monitor Student Learning; Professionalism and Membership in a Learning Community; and, Systematic Approach to Teaching. Teachers reported that they received valuable feedback from the evaluation process and were able to make improvements in instruction as a result.

The elementary and secondary academy leaders collaborate with the Teacher Center specialists in conducting some of the professional development. Academy leaders also meet with teachers to review data and problem-solve to determine interventions that students may need. Teachers at both levels reported that regular evaluations and informal classroom visits from the academy leaders take place. There is also a support system for the leader of each academy. Each academy leader has a UFT coach to provide support with instructional leadership. The specifics of these coaching relationships were not determined.

The school's leadership model is designed to support the empowerment and autonomy of teachers. As a result, there is variation in classroom rules and lesson planning. For example, school leaders do not systematically collect, monitor or provide feedback to teachers regarding their lesson plans or require a consistent format.

Although the school has expectations that all students will attend college, academic expectations for students' work are not notably high. There was some impressive writing in the lower grades, but most student work inspected lacked rigor and frequently consisted of worksheets calling for closed, rather than open, responses. Rubrics were often generic checklists that lacked high standards and quality indicators. In some instances, if an element called for in a rubric (such as 'include two facts') is present in a piece of student work, it is counted, but the quality of the element or response is not assessed. The inspection team visited 25 classrooms across the two academies. For the most part, teacher questions, one measure of rigor and high expectations for student learning, were at the level of recall and checking for knowledge and comprehension (in 92 percent of classrooms visited). The questions did not support the development of higher order skills such as critical thinking or analysis.

The rubric for scholarship in the CREST code (We treasure learning and will work diligently to achieve knowledge) has four descriptors at the elementary level: I will work hard on all of my assignments; I complete my homework every day; I present my work in a neat manner; I will use critical thinking. At the secondary level, the CREST code includes the statement: I know that college is my ultimate school goal. However, in the Code of Conduct at the secondary level, the reference to scholarship primarily addresses negative student behavior, rather than high scholarship and academic

achievement, and describes a set of disruptive student behaviors that may be grounds for suspension and possible expulsion, rather than positive behaviors that lead to reward and academic accomplishment. Scholarship was not well-defined for students.

The school should be commended on the resources that it provides for coaching and support of teachers and leaders. At the same time, however, the quality of student work was generally low and this led the inspection team to question the overall effect of instructional leadership.

Benchmark 1D.2: High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.

The overall instruction observed by the visiting team was generally strong at the elementary academy but inconsistent in the secondary academy. At the secondary academy, instructional time was not maximized; transitions between classes were inefficient and sometimes chaotic. The team observed 12 classes at the elementary academy and 13 classes at the secondary academy during its two-day visit.

There were learning objectives and behavioral objectives posted in the majority (80%) of classrooms visited overall. These objectives were explained to students in almost every elementary classroom (with one exception), but in only half of the secondary classrooms visited. While students were generally behaving according to these explicit objectives, the team noted that both reinforcement of positive behavior and consequences for misbehavior were less visible in the secondary academy. In this series of instructional snapshots, for example, the team noted the presence of positive reinforcement in 11 out of 12 elementary lessons while noting few examples in the secondary classroom observations.

Most learning was teacher-centered across both the elementary and secondary levels of the school. Guided practice, using examples or modeling, was noted in 76 percent of the lessons, and the team observed students completing independent practice (worksheets mainly) in 68 percent of the lessons observed overall. The inspection team also noted hands-on activities in 28 percent of the classrooms observed, mostly at the elementary academy. Group work, either cooperative or unstructured, occurred in 48 percent of the classrooms, but the effectiveness of this practice varied between general productivity and ineffective use of time.

While teachers at both sites checked for understanding and comprehension throughout the lesson, probing for analysis and elaboration was stronger at the elementary academy. Questioning to encourage higher order thinking skills was evident in 10 of the 12 elementary observations but only in 6 out of 13 secondary observations.

Instructional time was used effectively in 76 percent of the classrooms observed overall, but effective transitions occurred only 40 percent of the time. There is a significant loss of instructional time at the secondary level because of poor, time-consuming and, sometimes, chaotic passing between classes that results in the loss of valuable minutes of instruction every day as classes generally begin later than scheduled. For example, seventh period, the extended day, began at 3:00 p.m. instead of 2:50 p.m., as scheduled. Since these classes conclude at 3:35 p.m., the loss of ten minutes is significant. One class was observed returning from lunch 20 minutes late. At the secondary academy, a 20-minute Town Hall meeting is conducted each day for the entire school. The meeting observed did not start on time and approximately half of the students seemed to be disengaged (not vocalizing the pledge, not tracking the speakers and engaging in side conversations). It appears that it is the intent to use this time each day to build upon the democratic nature of the school's mission, but the inspection team questioned the use of time.

One barrier to high quality instruction raised by staff may be the requirement that, in order for experienced New York City Department of Education teachers to retain their seniority, they must return to the DOE after three years if they work at the charter school. Therefore, veteran teachers employed by the school may elect to leave if they are concerned about job security. This may result in a consistent influx of new and inexperienced teachers who need training. There is, however, a procedure that helps to ensure that quality teachers are hired. Candidates are interviewed by an eight-person committee and are required to teach a demonstration lesson.

Benchmark 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.

Programs for at-risk students are a strength of the UFT Charter School, although their effectiveness is not tracked. The school has support systems and programs in place during the day and after school.

During the school day, special education teachers typically use an inclusion model to serve identified students and provide academic remediation. At the elementary level, only two students have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for academic issues. Another 13 receive support for speech and languages. Fifteen elementary students also receive individualized instruction (called Academic Intervention Support) from the special education coordinator during the school day.

School leaders report that although additional students have been referred, some parents have declined evaluations. Accommodations (504s) are made for students, as needed. Evidence of accommodations was seen in lesson plans examined from the secondary academy. There are programs in place to support social and emotional growth at both levels. Second Step, a program to develop and improve students’ social-emotional skills, is also being implemented in elementary classrooms. Two school counselors at the elementary academy and a social worker at the secondary academy also work with students in need of support. They maintain contact with parents regarding student progress. A peer mediation program at the secondary academy has been organized by the social worker to help students resolve interpersonal issues, and this program was recognized by teachers and students as effective.

Extended-day programs are in place at both academies. At the elementary academy, some classroom teachers provide tutoring in an Excellence Academy two days each week. This program is designed to help approximately 30 second and third graders prepare for the state assessments in English language arts and mathematics. Pre- and post-tests are administered to students to determine the effectiveness of this intervention. Other after-school programming at the elementary site is outsourced to Groundworks – a community-based organization that serves about 80 percent of the youngsters. Students participate in a variety of activities, including mathematics tutoring through the use of math games. The inspection team was told that there is a plan to add literacy instruction next year. At the secondary academy, the seventh period is considered the extended day and Academic Intervention Support (AIS) is provided at this time. Five staff members serve 20 students who require this support, while others participate in enrichment activities. In the classes observed, students worked on reading strategies and science vocabulary. While the Institute’s Second-Year Inspection Report noted problems with use of this time block, this year’s inspection team noted consistently positive classroom behavior, solid instruction and an effective use of time in 80% of the classes observed.

Last summer (2007), 30 students at risk for not passing the state tests were provided with mathematics, English language arts and physical education instruction. The four-week program met for four hours each day, four days a week. For other students, a packet of summer work was sent home. The inspection team could not determine the overall effectiveness of this program because no analysis was provided. Another program was planned for the summer of 2008.

The quality of activities and effective use of time in advisory periods varies across the school. Daily (except Wednesdays) advisory periods take place at the secondary academy. In these same-sex advisories, according to students, discussions take place about life skills, solutions to problems, issues at school, grades and ways to improve. The topic at an advisory period observed by a member of the inspection team during the visit was communication through body language. Another group was discussing the pillars of learning, which include factors that appear on student report cards (such as persistence, collective responsibility and self-discipline). Another group of boys was talking about racial and gender implication of rap music lyrics. The advisory program is managed by the school community and culture director who also suggests themes for the sessions (e.g., decision-making, self-esteem and violence prevention). Staff members volunteer to run an advisory period and are free to plan advisory sessions as desired. Lesson plans for advisory periods are not required nor are advisors evaluated as such.

There were no English language learners requiring services at the time of the inspection visit. Therefore, there were no programs for students at risk based on language acquisition issues.

Benchmark 1E: The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.

The school's written documents, while thoughtful and intentional in terms of designing a learning environment and school culture, were not consistently implemented across the two campuses. There is a framework, but implementation is uneven. For example, although there is a school-wide behavior code and discipline policy, with rules that are posted in most teachers' classrooms, it is not enforced with standardized procedures. Classroom rules are not consistent across the two buildings, nor are they necessarily consistent among classrooms in one building.

Classroom management was mentioned by teachers in several focus groups at each academy as the greatest challenge at the school. With respect to consistent implementation of the code, one item on a teacher survey recently conducted was: A written code of conduct and consequences, which regulates student behavior, is supported and adhered to. Of the 19 responses in the elementary academy, 12 either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed. At the secondary academy, 6 out of 10 teachers responding to this item tended to disagree or strongly disagreed.

The inspection team noted limited consequences for misbehavior. Low-level misbehavior and disengagement was not addressed and students buzzed and chattered during many classes observed. For example, behavioral expectations were clearly displayed/posted in 18 of the 25 (72 percent) of the classes observed, but students behaved according to posted expectations in only 64 percent of those classes. Consequences were evident for misbehavior in only six (24 percent) instances. Reward/reinforcement for positive behavior was seen in eleven instances (44 percent). The team noted several examples of reinforcement of the CREST guidelines (Community, Responsibility, Excellence, Scholarship, Trustworthiness), when a student showed responsibility or trustworthiness. The team did not, however, see any specific examples and references to excellence or scholarship.

Although not always consistently implemented, the CREST culture is basically in place. Teachers do praise appropriate classroom behavior, thus giving children opportunities to earn CREST chips, which are used to reward students for proper demeanor. One parent said, "Kids live the CREST."

Students at the secondary academy can explain the values and the systems to encourage CREST. At each of the school's two buildings, a daily community gathering (called town hall, at the secondary level) is held, in which CREST is reinforced. Students recite the code and the Pledge of Allegiance. There are shout-outs (compliments about student achievements, attendance or behavior), a quote of the day and general announcements.

In the secondary academy, the inspection team perceived an overall lack of student engagement and respect at the town hall. Students were noted to be chatting and buzzing among themselves, rather than attending to the program. The team noted that the program is well-planned and could be more powerful as a culture builder, if a more effective behavior management system were in place. Teachers are not required to participate in the town hall, and thus there is a lack of supervision.

Benchmark 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.

Professional development is well-resourced and addresses a variety of school and teacher needs, although overall effectiveness has not been determined. The UFT Charter School's professional development program provides a Teacher Center at both the elementary and secondary buildings along with a Teacher Center specialist (TCS) who coaches, mentors and provides training and support to teachers in the development and implementation of curriculum and instruction. There are seven new teachers at the school's elementary site, and eight first-year teachers at the secondary site who receive one-on-one mentoring by the TCS.

Coaching for new teachers is provided for two hours each week at both sites. The teacher is observed by the TCS for one hour. This is followed by a one-on-one session for feedback and debriefing regarding practices, such as lesson development, use of data, pace of instruction, assessment, flexible grouping, differentiated instruction, student management and self-reflection. New elementary teachers also participate in a two-week intensive summer institute in which they learn about the school, build community and review curriculum. The agenda for the 2007 Summer Institute (elementary) indicated that teachers received an orientation regarding the school mission, CREST, Habits of Critical Thinking, and participated in teambuilding activities. Summer training at the secondary academy consisted of working through the Understanding by Design model to determine essential questions and instructional plans for curriculum. Teachers developed six- and nine-week instructional units in content areas.

At the elementary academy, teachers were scheduled for professional development for 100 minutes every other Monday after school, and a full day every other month. Mathematics and writing had been a focus for some of these sessions. The inspection team noted that some of the professional development in writing conformed to best practice in that it was sustained over four sessions as opposed to being a one-time event. Teachers also had two hours weekly to develop curriculum (lesson planning) and had grade-level common planning time weekly. Notes from these meetings showed that teachers discussed topics such as science and social studies lessons, assessments, writing genres and expectations for students. There is a site-based professional development committee that includes a teacher representative from each grade level.

Professional development at the secondary level may be organized for new teachers, for departmental staff by subject, for the entire staff or self-selected. The full staff meets monthly. According to the professional development calendar, three workshops dealt with data analysis. Another session was held on rubric development as teachers came to agreement as to what, for example, a "3" or a "4"

should look like. The secondary staff meets for one hour on Wednesday afternoons. Sometimes groups break out for departmental meetings. According to leadership, one focus for these meetings is to address curriculum and for teachers to develop plans for the use of data to drive instruction. Based on the state assessment, for example, English language arts teachers revised their curriculum to include a focus on genre. One self-selected study group at the secondary level is studying classroom management. Another is focusing on performance learning and assessment.

In focus group interviews, one area in which some elementary teachers indicated a need for further training was in more fully developing the co-teaching model in their classrooms. Secondary teachers expressed the need for professional development in collaborative teaching on a recent teacher survey. In the survey, teachers at both levels expressed a need for further training in behavior/classroom management. A professional development committee at the elementary academy, in consultation with the rest of the staff, helps determine topics for training.

In summary, the program of professional development at the UFT Charter School, guided by leadership and the Teacher Center specialist, addresses a variety of school and teacher needs and offers a comprehensive mentoring component. To date, however, the school has not deliberately evaluated the effectiveness of implementation to determine the impact on instruction and student achievement.

Part 2. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability

A. Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

Benchmark 2B: The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.

The mission of the UFT Charter School is:

The UFT Charter School will prepare all students to achieve academic and personal excellence. The Elementary Academy of the UFT Charter School will graduate students fully prepared for a demanding secondary education. The Secondary Academy of the UFT Charter School will graduate students fully prepared for a demanding college education. Both academies will help to prepare students for meaningful lives as full democratic citizens in a free society.

All stakeholders, when asked the mission of the school, are able to articulate key elements, such as preparation for a rigorous education and for college, democracy and being active participants in the community. Students mentioned, "getting better educated and learning more," as well as "strict rules." Others articulated elements of the CREST code (community, responsibility, excellence, scholarship and trustworthiness). Parents said that the academic program, preparing children for the outside world, and CREST are the main mission.

This school's charter includes an array of design elements, many of which appear to be in place. The school has a democratic governance structure with participation from all constituents. There is an emphasis on professional development at each of the school's sites (the elementary and secondary). A dress code and CREST core values are in evidence and there is an academic-based after school program at the elementary and secondary levels.

While hampered by classroom management and poor behavior in transition (especially in the secondary academy), there is evidence of high aspirations. A majority of teachers reported in their focus groups that they have high expectations for their students but this was not typically observed in instruction across the two academies. Classes are named for noted colleges, e.g., Princeton, Harvard, Yale and Brown. Banners from colleges such as Dartmouth, New York University, Stanford and Yale hang in the hallways. While these college banners are important symbols, the inspection team did not find that there was a consistent culture of excellence and scholarship in the classrooms. Similarly, the implementation of “Habits for Thought” was not evident to the inspection team in lesson plans, student work, focus groups or classroom observations. There is no obvious connection in the lesson plans reviewed that instruction is actually fostering Habits of Life and Thought outlined in the mission. This element of the mission is also referred to as the ABCs of Critical Thinking (analysis, breadth of perspective, connection, discourse and evidence).

The school has incorporated most design elements from its charter, although there is an inconsistent level of implementation in areas such as CREST values and high academic expectations.

B. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

Benchmark 2D: Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.

Parents and students interviewed by the inspection team expressed satisfaction with the school. The seven elementary parents interviewed were all very positive. Some hold leadership roles: one is president of the parent organization and another is a representative on the board. Parents interviewed are pleased with communication from the elementary academy. They have multiple opportunities to learn about their children’s progress in the form of the report cards issued six times a year. They receive a Best of CREST report weekly, describing their children’s adherence to the CREST code. They feel welcome to contact teachers who return calls and notes. Finally, the homework schedule is sent home for the whole week. As one parent put it, “Teachers are good at communicating with parents.” They also expressed the belief that their children have made more progress than they would have in the regular public schools. The three secondary parents interviewed appreciate the safe environment and discipline.

Parents of elementary students learn about the curriculum through a curriculum walk at the start of the school year that previews what students will be learning. Other family events include a workshop on the state English language arts assessment and a planned family day. Elementary parents were very positive about the fact that there are two teachers in the kindergarten through 3rd grade classrooms and that the school is run by the UFT. One called it “a teachers’ school with teachers in charge.” Other features mentioned positively by parents were small groups for instruction, a sense of community, the intervention program, pull-out services for reading, the counselors, frequent diagnostic testing, the after-school program and safety. There is an active parent-teacher association (PTA) that attracts 20-25 parents to monthly meetings, with speakers on topics such as employment and daycare.

When asked about a wish list for the school, one parent mentioned the need to educate teachers regarding the community demographics. One parent said that teachers come from other neighborhoods and some are not aware of the dynamics of inner city culture and may lack sensitivity to students. Another mentioned the need for more technology and a computer lab. One felt that the school is too strict and sets too many limits on children.

Elementary students interviewed said that they like the school. They reported that they do a lot of writing and that they help each other with work. A letter to the inspection team from a third grade

student indicated that he thinks the school is special because there are two teachers in each classroom and because the “school leader cares for us.”

Secondary students indicated that the school is challenging; “teachers are always helpful” and keep students apprised of their grades. They mentioned various learning opportunities, such as extended day classes and summer school. They said that the purpose of the school is “a chance for people to learn things” and “there is more than one way to learn.” They noted that the school leader is frequently in classes, that they can always go to him and that “he cares.” When asked what was different about this school, they indicated that it is more challenging with more homework. There is new technology and the “teachers work well with you.” When asked what they would change, they mentioned that lunch is too early and that the uniforms are “dull and depressing.” At the secondary academy, students have opportunities for leadership and community service through participation in the reading buddies project. They leave the building on Wednesday afternoons to go to the elementary academy and other schools to read with younger children.

A family survey conducted at the secondary academy in June 2007 had 116 out of 116 family responses, an incredible return rate. The parents’ responses showed that they either strongly agreed or tended to agree with most indicators such as: “The ...School has high academic standards for my child.” The indicator with the strongest agreement was “I feel welcome at the...School.” Next highest was “My child’s teacher is knowledgeable about the subject matter.” The area with the lowest rating was, “The...School provides necessary academic support for my child.”

Board minutes indicated that, as of February 7, 2008, elementary enrollment was 309 out of an anticipated 325. At the secondary academy, enrollment on that date was 236 – 14 short of the goal of 250. Leadership indicated that transience reflects patterns in District 19, the surrounding neighborhood. Board members reported that families who move are generally leaving the state, rather than transferring children to other local schools because of dissatisfaction with the UFT Charter School. The waitlist is extensive at the elementary level. There were more than 400 applications for 100 kindergarten slots for September 2007.

C. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

Benchmark 2C.1: The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals

The school board is comprised of 13 members who meet four times per year. The board’s thirteen members consist of four community representatives (external trustees); two parents (elementary and secondary); two teachers (elementary and secondary); the two school leaders; and, three members of the UFT, including the president as chair of the board. Outside of the UFT seats, all other trustees have three-year terms. Board members articulated the goals of the school as closing the achievement gap and meeting high academic standards. Committees of the board include a recently-formed ad-hoc tenure committee, a standing financial committee, a personnel committee (which has not met recently) and the elementary and secondary committees.

At the academy level, governance consists of a committee with parent and teacher representatives from this committee to the board. Each academy also has a personnel committee for teacher hiring. The academy committees, which generally meet monthly, also meet two weeks before the quarterly board meetings to determine what issues need to be presented to the board. The board agenda, which is developed collaboratively by email among the members, is posted in the office at each of the two

sites. Some examples of issues addressed by the board have been the policy for promotion, summer programming and the effectiveness of the extended school day. Board minutes record the basics of attendance, whether there was a quorum, approval of minutes, and the school leaders' reports.

The governance structure of the UFT Charter School presents certain challenges. The board of trustees of the UFT Charter School has a membership structure that includes some of the school's employees (e.g., the leaders of the two academies and two teachers, who are hired by and report to the board) as voting members. The degree to which workers in the school have voting rights and governance responsibilities for the school is unusual. For example, if a school leader places a proposal before the board to fund a summer school, that leader has a vote in the decision-making process, as does his/her fellow leader at the other campus. On most boards decisions are made by people who will not carry out the motion or are not directly affected by the decision. Board members present during the focus group session did reference a conflict of interest policy but could not explain it nor give an example of when it had been used. The inspection team notes that there were only five members of the board present during the focus group interview due to a miscommunication about scheduling.

The inspection team also noted other board challenges. For example, the board had not evaluated the academy leaders and, yet, were traditionally responsible for hiring and supervision of academy leadership. Board members interviewed were not aware of performance goals for school leaders, which are usually set by a board and upon which annual evaluations are based. Moreover, with the recent resignation of the elementary school leader at the end of the 2007-08 school year, board members interviewed indicated that they were not aware of the process to replace her. They were unable to comment on whether the board or UFT will find the replacement. The likely scenario, according to one board member, is that UFT will conduct the search process and present candidates for the board to review.

The board had also not conducted a self-evaluation nor had it provided training to its members in board governance. The role of UFT as a provider of services to the board had not been evaluated. On one occasion when the chair was absent, the meeting was chaired by the UFT charter school coordinator, who is not a board member. The board also lacks a formal grievance procedure. Grievances go through the UFT.

While the board provides oversight of the two school sites, there is a general lack of clarity (evident in the focus group of five members) as to membership, decision-making authority and generally accepted governance practices. The board and the school community might benefit from additional clarity regarding UFT's role as "partner organization."

VI. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

The UFT Charter School has created an academic program with a solid curriculum, a variety of assessments and a high level of support for teachers. While at the time of the inspection visit the school had not yet developed a fully refined culture of using data to continually inform instruction and support individual students, the elements of systematic review were emerging. The school has made great efforts to support struggling students and new teachers.

The Teacher Center was active and highly visible at each academy and both supported and encouraged best practices. The dedicated staff member of the Teacher Center spends two hours per

week with each new teacher (seven at the elementary site and eight at the secondary site). While this level of support is crucial in the early development of the school, leaders also recognized the need to attract and retain experienced teachers.

There was not yet, however, a pervasive culture of high expectations and excellence. The level of rigor was inconsistent from classroom to classroom. The majority of classrooms observed included teacher-led instruction, and there was little evidence of students engaged in higher-order thinking skills. Instructional quality and transition management was an issue in the newer secondary academy. The school's written documents, while thoughtful and intentional in terms of designing a learning environment and school culture, were not consistently implemented across the school's two sites.

The academic program at UFT is documented and supported but needs more consistency in instruction and classroom management across classrooms and across campuses.

Organizational Viability

Stakeholders in the UFT community were clear on the overall college mission of the school and they felt that they have a voice in governance with the school's unique governance structure. From the high return of the family survey and from the positive results, there is evidence that families are very satisfied with the school. School leaders worked together on initiatives, such as planning and funding a summer school for each campus. School leaders also recognized the work ahead to transition students from the elementary to the secondary campus.

There is evidence of many functioning committees at the UFT Charter School, ranging from the academy committees that are liaisons to the board, as well as the ad hoc committees that teachers generate at each academy. Leadership of the academies is intentionally decentralized and while these committees meet weekly or monthly, the board meets once a quarter.

The board has an inclusive make-up, which it appears the school community would benefit from better understanding in terms of its roles and decision-making authority. With the caveat that only five board members were present for the focus group interview due to miscommunication, the board members attending the focus group could not fully articulate the board's role in governance. Currently, there is a lack of decision-making transparency between the UFT as partner and the board as governing body of the school. While this may be understood by some members, there are board members, as well as community members, who are unclear about this relationship. The inspection team questioned some of the governance practices at the school.

The school is aware of the issues that it faces and recognizes that there is much work ahead to fully develop the structure to manage two school campuses, as well as the challenges of a school in its very early phases.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

Category	Report Section (Relevant Benchmark(s))	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	School Performance Review (Renewal Benchmark 1.A)	Developed by Institute
	School Educational Program Review (Renewal Benchmarks 1.B – 1.F)	Classroom observations; Interviews; Review of documents and student work
Organizational Viability	School’s Mission and Vision (Renewal Benchmark 2.B)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations
	Student and Parent Satisfaction (Renewal Benchmark 2.D.1)	Interviews; Review of school documents, including the Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Board of Trustees’ Systems (Renewal Benchmark 2.C.1)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations