



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

**CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT
FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

**SISULU CHILDREN'S ACADEMY HARLEM
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL**

JANUARY 2004

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INTRODUCTION

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 ("the Act") authorizes the State University of New York Board of Trustees to grant charters to applicants for the purpose of organizing and operating an independent and autonomous public charter school. The purpose of the Act is to authorize a system of charter schools in order to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- Improve student learning and achievement;
- Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.¹

When granted, a charter is valid for up to five years. For a school chartered under the Act to operate beyond the initial charter term, the school must seek and obtain renewal of its charter.²

In order to assist the State University Trustees in their responsibilities under the Charter Schools Act, the State University Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Among its duties, the Charter Schools Institute is charged with evaluating renewal applications and providing its findings and recommendations to the State University Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the State University Trustees its findings and recommendation regarding a renewal application. The report's purpose is to assist the State University Trustees in evaluating the merits of a school's renewal application and more broadly the merits of a school's case for renewal. The report has been created and is issued pursuant to the State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures.³

¹ See § 2850 of the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

² See §§ 2851(4) and 2852 of the Act.

³ A summary of the State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (May 20, 2003) is available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

The Act prescribes specific requirements for a charter school renewal application. Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. The Act requires that a school's charter renewal application include:

- A report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- A detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- Copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements;
- Indications of parent and student satisfaction.⁴

The Charter Schools Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.⁵

As a charter authorizing entity, the State University Trustees can renew a charter for a term of up to five years so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings:

- The charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- The applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner; and
- Granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.⁶

Where the State University Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.⁷ The Regents may approve or return and comment on the proposed charter, ultimately leading to final approval of the renewal charter either by vote of the Regents or by operation of law.⁸

⁴ § 2851(4)

⁵ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute website. See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/howto/renewal.html>.

⁶ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁷ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

⁸ See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

Process for Renewal

This report contains the findings and recommendations of the Institute regarding a school's application for charter renewal. While that renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan"⁹) setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").¹⁰ This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program. Reports and de-briefings for the school's board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, the Institute provides general advice as to potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute contracts with third party, school inspection experts to conduct a comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

By the start of the fifth year of a school's charter, it must submit an application for charter renewal, setting forth the evidence required by law and the State University. Applicant charter schools are asked to formulate and report evidence of success in answer to four renewal questions:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/reports.html> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

¹⁰ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/Model%20Progress%20Report1.pdf> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

The application is reviewed by staff and staff conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This includes examination of the school's charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examine audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, a lead member of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete (professional development plans, special education plans, school newsletters, etc.). Renewal visit team members visit classes, observe lessons, examine student work, sit in on school meetings, interview staff members and speak informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's board of trustees and administrators.

This evidence gathering is structured by a set of benchmarks, paralleling the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the accountability plan structure, the charter renewal requirements in the Charter Schools Act of 1998; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.¹¹

During the renewal visit, the Institute's renewal visit team debriefs regularly to share evidence and generate analyses as well as determine if more evidence is needed to confirm the school's performance against the renewal benchmarks. Through this process, the team generates a set of preliminary findings which are presented to the school at the end of the renewal visit.

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team meets to organize and finalize the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks and rubrics are discussed, and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark rubric. The completed rubrics present a focus for discussion and summary of findings. The rubrics are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support but do not individually or in limited combination provide the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation.

The Institute then prepares a draft report and provides a copy to the school for its review and comment. The draft contains the findings, discussion and the evidence base for those findings, but does not contain a recommendation. Upon receiving a school's comment, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and determines its findings in their final form. The report is then finalized, recommendations are included, and copies are provided to the members of the Committee on Charter Schools, the other members of the State University Board of Trustees and the schools themselves. This report is the product of that process.

¹¹ <http://www.effectiveschools.com>

READER'S GUIDE

The report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Findings, Renewal Rubrics, and Recommendation. As the material in the introduction as well as the School Description speak for themselves, no guidance is provided. Guidance as to the remaining sections is broken out below.

1. Findings

The Findings are separated into four sections corresponding to the four questions that a charter school seeking renewal must answer and must provide evidence supporting its answer. They are:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

Below each finding is a summary of the evidence supporting the finding. That evidence is contained in the rubrics included in this report which follow the findings in this report.

The ordering of the findings, with those regarding academic outcomes and program first reflect the fact that renewal of a State University authorized charter is primarily based on a school's progress towards performance-based goals that the charter school and the Institute agreed to in the school's Accountability Plan. However, while success in meeting these goals is the primary determining factor, the school's ability to demonstrate that its educational program as implemented is effective and that the organization is viable, fiscally stable and in compliance with applicable law are all important factors. So, too, the school must be able to show that its plans for the charter renewal term are feasible, reasonable and most of all achievable.

2. Rubrics

The evidence supporting each finding is structured and organized by a set of rubrics known as the Renewal Rubrics. Each rubric contains a performance benchmark, e.g., the school uses assessment and evaluation data to ensure that the state performance standards are being met. As noted above, the rubrics are not used as a scorecard, since the constituent benchmarks do not have equal weight, do not provide context, and do not indicate future prospects for school performance. The rubrics do, however, provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which an applicant school met accountability and operational standards.

3. Recommendation

This section of the report contains the recommendation of the Institute as to the disposition of the application for charter renewal. Under the State University's Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures, the Institute may make one of the following types of recommendations:

- **Early renewal:** available to schools in the fourth year of the charter which have already made a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal. Schools that gain early renewal will then have five full years of instruction before facing renewal again, thus allowing them to concentrate on instruction and providing them with more ready access to capital markets.
- **Short-term planning year renewal:** available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools will be able with limited review to obtain renewal in order to allow them to gather at least four full years of data before facing a full-blown renewal review.
- **Renewal:** available to schools in their fifth year. Schools that have a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal will be eligible for a renewal term of five years.
- **Renewal with conditions:** available to schools that have a compelling and unambiguous educational record of success but that have material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that practically cannot be completely corrected by the time of renewal—so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to a determination that the school is fiscally, legally and organizationally sound.
- **Short-term renewal:** available to schools in their fifth year that present an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement, but that have taken concrete steps to correct those deficiencies and such steps are likely to lead to educational success with additional time. Typically, but not necessarily, short-term renewal will be for two years. A short-term renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- **Non-renewal:** where a school does not present a favorable case for renewal (short term, conditional, or otherwise), the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

In addition to the recommendation itself (and any conditions made part of that recommendation), this section also contains the findings required by subdivision 2852(2) of the Education Law, including whether the school, if renewed, is likely to improve student learning and achievement. Each recommendation is the product of the totality of the evidence gathered.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School was approved by the State University Board of Trustees in July of 1999 and by the Board of Regents in August of that year. It opened in September 1999 with an enrollment of 247 students in grades K-2.

The school's original enrollment plans were to add one grade level per year growing to a total enrollment of some 647 students in grades K-6. Facility considerations made this growth plan impossible. During the term of this charter, the school has operated out of two facilities. Currently, the school serves 300 children in grades K, 3, 4, and 5. Grades K, 3, and 4 are located at 115th Street with 5th grade classes convening in the Police Athletic League located a few blocks away on Manhattan Avenue.

The school's founders sought to provide a quality public education alternative for one of the poorest areas in Manhattan – the school is located in Community School District 5. Sisulu includes the following mission statement in its Accountability Plan:

The mission of the Sisulu Children's Academy is to become one of the finest public schools in America. The Academy will be built on the philosophy that all children can learn and the Academy will ensure that students meet or exceed New York State performance standards.

The focus of the Academy will be on the core skills of reading, language arts and mathematics. The Academy will be organized to provide an extended day, a high degree of individualized instruction and an innovative research-based academic curriculum.

The school contracts with Victory Schools, Inc. for its management. Victory Schools seeks to improve public education by assisting in the start-up and management of public charter schools of outstanding quality, particularly those created to serve at-risk students. Built on the premise that all children can learn, Victory Schools uses an educational program that employs Direct Instruction, Scott Foresman Reading, Core Knowledge and an extended school day schedule featuring a strong enrichment component based on thematic curricula.

FINDINGS

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

Finding 1: Based on available data, the school has not fully attained all academic goals set forth in its Accountability Plan. However, the school's board of trustees has instituted an internal review protocol resulting in an academic program that shows promise for increasing the academic achievement of students.

Sisulu struggled to post academic gains as measured by standardized tests in the early years of its charter. While data from New York State's 4th grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments show academic gains from 2002 to 2003, standardized test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills show variation in Sisulu's ability to ensure its students made academic gains across four years of scores.

Sisulu included in its accountability plan a value-added measure of student performance. That measure calls for the school to raise student achievement in each grade level by an average of 3 percentile gains per year in both English Language Arts and mathematics on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Over the first two years of the school's charter (1999-2000 and 2000-2001), Sisulu was substantially able to meet this measure. In 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, however, Sisulu substantially failed to meet this goal. As a result, the school's academic progress toward meeting its value-added measure shows mixed results. In English Language Arts, the school's scores show the goal was met in four out of nine possible instances. In mathematics, the school met its goal in six out of eleven possible instances. The school has experienced a low level of success in reaching this accountability plan goal.

In its fourth year, however, Sisulu made significant strides in meeting an absolute measure of increasing the percentage of children passing the New York State 4th grade English Language Arts (an increase of 10 % from the previous year) and mathematics assessments (and increase of 37% from the previous year). In fact, Sisulu improved performance from having four percent of students in 4th grade pass the 2002 New York State mathematics assessment to 41 percent of students in 4th grade passing the same assessment in 2003. While this is a strong improvement, it underscores the percentage of students who have yet to attain State standards and it is based on limited evidence; two administrations of both the 4th grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments and the resulting measure of percentage gain from 2002 to 2003. With this strong

but limited evidence of success, the school is considered to have made limited progress toward this accountability plan goal.

In addition to absolute results on the State assessments outlined above, Sisulu posted notable and consistent progress on New York City's third grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments from 2002 to 2003. In English Language Arts, 28 percent of Sisulu's third graders passed the New York City test in 2002. The school improved its percentage passing rate in 2003 to 37%. This passing rate exceeded both that of Community School District 5 (22%) and that of "similar schools" P.S. 149 (29%) and P.S. 180 (8%). P.S. 149 and P.S. 180 were chosen for comparison purposes, as both schools are similar to Sisulu in demographic enrollment. In mathematics, 20 percent of Sisulu's 3rd graders passed the New York City assessment in 2002 improving to 30 percent passing in 2003.

Results from New York State's 4th grade mathematics assessment in 2002 and in 2003 indicate that the school's absolute scores fell below both similar schools and the district. However, Sisulu's gain in improving achievement as measured on that test outpaced both District 5 and P.S. 149.

The school's board of trustees compiled and analyzed this data in the fourth year of Sisulu's charter. The school's board was disappointed and dissatisfied with the rate and strength of student academic achievement at the school. As a result of this analysis, the board rightly determined that curriculum and instructional changes were required for Sisulu to serve students in the way envisioned in the school's mission. The board worked with its education service provider to refine and revise its curriculum.

The changes identified by the board are currently in place at the school and are beginning to bear the evidence of academic gains. This evidence includes the aforementioned gain in performance on the 2003 administration of New York State's 4th grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments and 3rd grade scores on the New York City English Language Arts and mathematics assessments. Samples of student work evaluated during the school's charter renewal visit also show evidence of academic improvement. The work of analyzing and responding to student performance data shows the school's board, current principal and staff have an internal system of assessment and performance analysis that the Institute found to be fully functioning and operational at the time of renewal.

Finding 2: To strengthen students' ability to meet or exceed the New York State performance standards, the school's English Language Arts and mathematics curriculum and instructional strategies have changed

significantly in the 5th year of its charter. Both were inadequate in the earlier years of the school's charter.

The curriculum analysis led by Sisulu's board of trustees after its review of disappointing achievement data, revealed the school's use of Direct Instruction for reading and mathematics was not a viable or productive curriculum choice and was not resulting in student achievement such that the school could fully meet the academic goals included in its accountability plan. The school's board of trustees engaged in an analysis that included student achievement data, interviews, observations of classroom instruction, instructional leadership, and assessment practices and determined changes in curriculum and instructional leadership were required for the school to succeed in becoming one of the best schools in the country as indicated in the mission of the school.

While the presentation of reading and decoding skills in Direct Instruction (which Sisulu used extensively in the early years of its charter) offered a skill based instructional foundation, the board found it did not provide students with the comprehension, analysis and synthesis skills required to understand and compare literature nor to enrich mathematics, writing and language arts in the manner demanded by State performance standards. The board also found that the classroom implementation of Direct Instruction was at times inconsistent and not supported by strong instructional leadership.

In addition to deciding the school needed a principal with proven instructional leadership skills, the board determined that the curriculum should shift to include the Scott-Foresman reading program (a text book series that provides foundational skills and demands higher levels of comprehension) while maintaining the use of Direct Instruction for students struggling to acquire basic reading and decoding skills. In addition, the board determined the need for a rigorous writing program and a change from Direct Instruction mathematics to use of the University of Chicago's Everyday Mathematics Program. These changes have been implemented and are producing increasingly stronger evidence of student learning and achievement.

The board of trustees hired a veteran principal with a strong record of improving student achievement at New York City's P.S. 83 in District 11. Now the school's principal, this individual is well versed with the school's curriculum and spends a significant amount of time in classrooms monitoring instruction and modeling sound instructional practices. In addition, teachers meet in grade level teams and after school with the principal to hone instructional skills, plan lessons, and assess student work products. The rigor and dedication to success the school staff displays in these efforts has resulted in volumes of student written work that

demonstrate qualities demanded by New York State performance standards.

2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Finding 1: Though uneven at earlier times in the school's charter, at the beginning of the school's 5th year, the energetic principal and teaching staff have created an academically focused learning environment.

A series of three individuals served as Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School's principal during the term of this charter. Annual Institute visit reports and the State Education Department's third year visit report indicate the school's level of instructional rigor, internal assessment structure, and leadership fluctuated under these personnel changes. The school currently has a principal who holds demonstrated success in building academic success in a New York City elementary school. She has instituted a staff and professional development structure that focuses unmistakably on maximizing instruction and ensuring students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to excel academically.

Sisulu's current teaching staff clearly articulates the instructional challenges they face in the classroom and the strengths they are building in their commitment to professional development. Teachers at the school are focused on meeting the learning needs of Sisulu's children. Staff commitment is evident both in interviews about expectations for student success and in the amount of time and energy teachers devote to designing and executing lessons that are likely to lead to improved academic achievement for their children. Teachers display a real commitment to ensuring student academic success through their words and actions. Eager attendance at professional development sessions and constant analysis of maturing strengths in instructional practice is a hallmark of the school's current teaching staff. Common curriculum plans link classroom lessons to State performance standards. Classrooms are generally orderly and reflect high expectations for student behavior and achievement.

Finding 2: The school has yet to fulfill its mission to become one of the finest schools in the country. The school is on its way to implementing key design elements, especially in the areas of teaching and learning.

Though Sisulu achieved academic gains in the early years of its charter, the strength and consistency of those gains flagged during the school's third year. In the later years of its charter, Sisulu posted academic gains that show it can, with continuing instructional leadership and strong focus on English Language Arts and mathematics, fulfill its mission. Most promising are the gains in student test scores and the volume and quality

of student work in evidence during the renewal visit and a follow up visit in December 2003. In addition, the school is using a system of internally developed tests in English Language Arts and mathematics. These tests are explicitly linked to the requirements in the New York State performance standards and are administered on a weekly and/or monthly basis. Teachers evaluate individual student progress and record and analyze the progress of entire classes toward meeting or exceeding State performance standards.

While Sisulu has not fully implemented certain key design elements, e.g., the school's civic program is embryonic at best, these failures must be viewed in context of the school's purposeful decision to focus on implementing those design elements that were most important to improving academic achievement. These include effective instruction and student achievement in the critical areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. As such, Sisulu now provides an academically focused after school program three days a week and has this year instituted a Saturday academic enrichment program. In addition, Sisulu has successfully implemented thematic units that are linked to State performance standards and are based on E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge Curriculum.

The level, volume and rigor of student written work available at the school supports the Institute's determination that the school now has a fully functioning and operational level of curriculum and instruction.

Finding 3: In the latter portion of its charter term, the school's board of trustees is providing strong leadership in assessing and revising the school's academic program as well as its financial position.

During the fourth year of its charter, the Sisulu board of trustees examined the school's progress toward the academic goals included in its accountability plan and determined the school was not well on its way to fulfilling the mission the founders and board envisioned for the children at Sisulu. In addition to examining data from standardized tests, the board formed an Academic Committee that observed in classrooms, examined student work, and held frank discussions with its education service provider, Victory Schools. The board concluded that curriculum and personnel changes were required if the school hoped to meet the goals set forth in its original charter application and accountability plan. It then worked with Victory to implement the necessary changes it had identified.

The board continues to work diligently on the school's academic program while focusing on identifying a solution to high facility costs and the ensuing fiscal constraints they impose. In addition to reorganizing the enrollment and growth pattern of the school and negotiating with its educational service provider to provide pro bono services, the board of

trustees is also seeking facility options that will lower the school's capital costs. While working to negotiate a more favorable lease agreement on the existing facility, the board is also seeking space that may be available through the New York City Department of Education should the school's charter be renewed.

In the final years of its charter, Sisulu's board of trustees articulated a unified and consistent commitment to the mission of the school. Its exemplary focus on increasing student achievement, support of its current instructional leader, and work in creating viable facility options to strengthen the school's fiscal position reveal a board with effective leadership that is fully functioning and operational.

Finding 4: Overall, there is strong evidence of student and parent satisfaction.

Sisulu's enrollment has held steady over the life of its charter. Each year of its charter, the school has maintained a waiting list of students hoping to enroll. Surveys conducted in each year of the charter show that Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School's responding parents and students believe the school compares favorably to other public schools and rate strongly the school's overall performance. Respondents cite the dedication of the school's board, the educational opportunities, art, and the science programs as some of the reasons they chose Sisulu. Over the life of the charter, response rates to parent surveys have fluctuated with some years showing a small percentage of surveys returned. Even with the vicissitudes in parent survey response rates, available evidence suggests that the school is fully functioning with regard to its goal of providing an education that satisfies the parents choosing Sisulu for their child's education.

Finding 5: The school has been, and presently appears to be, generally in substantial compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

The school has complied with all reporting requirements including academic accountability, submission of financial documents, audits, grants, enrollment documents, and board meeting minutes. A review of Institute files, board documents and interviews with members of Sisulu's board of trustees show the board's awareness of applicable laws and regulations and an overall record of compliance with such over the life of the charter.¹²

¹²Records indicate that the school billed the district for ineligible special education services during the 2002-03 school year and potentially during the two previous school years as well. These practices have been discontinued and corrective steps have been implemented by the school and its management company. The Institute is continuing

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Finding 1: Sisulu is a marginally viable entity from a purely fiscal standpoint.

During the term of the existing charter, Sisulu has held to a small school enrollment and has provided instruction in two facilities located a few blocks apart as it was unable to locate a facility large enough to house the enrollment set forth in its original charter. Even with the use of two facilities, the school was unable to locate space that allowed the growth envisioned in its original charter. Operating the school out of two facilities provided no economies of scale and indeed forced the school to incur some duplicative administrative costs over the life of the school.

Despite the need to devote a large percentage of revenue in order to maintain two facilities, Sisulu has maintained a nominally balanced budget throughout the life of its charter. Its ability to do so has been dependent upon Victory Schools first deferring fees (as required by the management contract) and later agreeing to provide services on a pro bono basis. As such, while the school was not operating on a balanced budget under the accrual method of accounting, it did not experience an operating deficit. At present, the existing management contract with Victory Schools requires Victory to provide its services on a pro bono basis through the 2004-2005 school year.

Accordingly, the school's financial position remains delicate and dependent upon reducing its facilities costs as well as the continuation of its pro bono agreement for provision of services with Victory Schools.

Finding 2: The School follows generally accepted accounting practices and has had successful audits for four straight fiscal years.

For each of the school years 1999-00, 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03, the school's audit has not indicated any material findings and no management letters were issued. In each of those years, the audit report contained the auditor's unqualified opinion that the financial statements were in conformance with generally accepted accounting principles. The school has displayed an exemplary level of development in this area.

its inquiry into the scope and nature of the billing discrepancies and may require that additional corrective steps be undertaken.

4. What Are the School's Plans for the Renewal Period and Are They Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?

Finding 1: Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School has submitted academic plans for the term of a next charter that are reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

As presented in the renewal application, the curriculum proposed for the term of a future charter contains an appropriate level of rigor and depth to enable students to succeed in meeting the New York State performance standards for grades K-5. If well implemented, the English Language Arts curriculum, especially in the nexus created by the use of a challenging reading program, the Core Knowledge curriculum and a strong writing program, are likely to provide Sisulu's students a strong foundation for success as measured by the New York State 4th grade assessment.

Research on the effectiveness of the school's mathematics curriculum (Everyday Mathematics) shows some evidence of its ability to increase student achievement on state tests in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Florida.¹³ This research is tempered, however by the findings in studies reported by New York University that students experiencing mathematics instruction using the Everyday Mathematics curriculum should receive supplemental instruction in learning and memorizing the algorithms (basic mathematical operations and facts) critical to computational and problem solving success.¹⁴ Sisulu is currently providing some supplementation to the Everyday Mathematics curriculum in the form of classroom activities, weekly and monthly assessments that measure student progress and ability in mastering addition, subtraction, multiplication and division algorithms and facts.

The English Language Arts and mathematics curriculum discussed above is a continuation of the curriculum currently in place at the school. Of course, curriculum outlines and written plans, no matter how well laid out, do not ensure student success in meeting the State's academic performance standards. Critical to the continued growth of the academic program at the school are the efforts of the principal and staff in building a consistent level of instructional leadership, rigor, curriculum delivery, and classroom based assessment that directly link to the State's measures of

¹³ This research was conducted and reported by S.R.A. International, the publisher of Everyday Mathematics. The research downloaded on December 5, 2003 at: <http://www.sraonline.com/index.php/home/curriculumsolutions/mathematics/emfirstedition/studentachievement/729>

¹⁴ See www.math.nyu.edu

student academic performance. The school's future success in this area is dependent upon its ability to sustain its current level of instructional leadership and retain teachers facile in instruction and curriculum delivery.

The proposed accountability plan measures presented by Sisulu in its charter renewal application are largely appropriate. The Institute will work with the school to refine and finalize accountability plan measures for the term of a next charter school should the school's charter be renewed.

With the pre-condition that the school successfully implement its plans, the Institute believes the school's academic plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

Finding 2: The school faces challenges in regards to maintaining its fiscal viability.

Looking forward, Sisulu's long term fiscal stability relies on its ability to diminish its facilities costs and enter into a viable agreement regarding costs associated with its education service provider, Victory Schools.

The school's future fiscal stability will depend on its ability to negotiate more favorable lease terms at its existing facility or to reach an agreement with the New York City Department of Education whereby Sisulu can take advantage of the lower cost space the Department may have available. In addition, Sisulu is seeking the opportunity to participate in the federal charter school facilities financing demonstration project that would allow the school additional opportunities to reduce facility costs.

The Sisulu board of trustees will also need to pursue an agreement with its education service provider continuing Victory School's commitment to assist in operating the school in a manner that does not threaten its fiscal viability after the current agreement ends 2005. While the financial and facility issues facing the school are challenging, they are not insoluble. In its application for charter renewal, Sisulu presents a plan to scale back enrollment thereby reducing facilities costs. This, in conjunction with the pro bono contributions of its education service provider through 2005 and the anticipated reduction in facilities costs make the schools plans for a future charter reasonable, feasible and achievable.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings explicated above and supported by evidence gathered over the five year term of the school's charter, the Institute recommends that Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School's charter agreement with the State University of New York's Board of Trustees be renewed for a period of two years.

This recommendation is appropriate as the school's record of educational achievement during the term of its first charter is mixed. Standardized test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills show small increases in student learning from 1999 to 2001. However, performance on the same measure dropped dramatically from 2001-2003. They reveal that students attending Sisulu for one year posted a gain of six percentiles; for two years a gain of four percentiles; and students who attended Sisulu for three years posted a decline of four percentiles.

Measures of the school's absolute gains in performance show that from 2002-2003 all students tested in grade four gained 14 Performance Index points on the 4th grade New York state English Language Arts assessment and 66 Performance Index points on the 4th grade New York state mathematics assessment. In the same time period, the school made a nine point gain on the New York City 3rd grade English Language Arts assessment and a 10 point gain in the New York City 3rd grade mathematics assessment. These gains are notable, but in context reveal the distance remaining between the current academic attainment of Sisulu's students and the school's goal of becoming "one of the finest schools in America."

The level and rigor of classroom instruction and student work observed by the Charter Schools Institute and the State Education Department varied over the term of the school's charter as well. While some end of year reports by both the Institute and the State Education Department cite promising student work, other reports note low levels of rigor in classroom instruction and student academic work.

As outlined in the Findings and Rubrics in this report, the renewal visit confirmed that the school has implemented, in both its leadership structure and its classrooms, concrete steps which the Institute finds are likely to continue the nascent educational successes posted at the end of the school's current charter. A renewal of two years will allow the school to stabilize its teaching staff, instructional delivery, and allow it to gather and report additional evidence that the Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School continues to build a record of improving student learning and achievement.

Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School has in place an effective governance structure, evidence of parent satisfaction with the school's program, and has operated in a fiscally viable manner during the term of its first charter. The school's continued fiscal viability depends on its ability to craft a facility solution that does not impose the financial constraints of the school's current lease and does not require the school to accept pro bono services from its educational service provider. A renewal period of two years allows the school time to concretize

its fiscal viability through renegotiating of its existing lease, locating a new facility, or negotiating an extended agreement for pro bono services from its educational service provider.

The Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school has demonstrated the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner. Renewal of the school's charter for two years is likely to improve student learning and achievement and further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act.

The Institute therefore recommends that Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School's charter agreement with the State University Board of Trustees be approved for a two year charter renewal that allows the school to serve 300 students in grades K-5.

APPENDIX

Renewal Question 1 – Is the School an Academic Success

Rubric 1A.1 – Academic Attainment & Improvement – External Assessment

Benchmark	Level 4: Exemplary level of development and implementation	Level 3: Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Level 2: Limited development and/or partial implementation	Level 1: Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
1A.1.1 Absolute Measures (any New York State Assessment)	The school meets or exceeds the goal(s) as defined in the school's approved Accountability Plan over the five-year term of its charter.	The school approaches the goal(s) OR, if multiple data points are available, shows meaningful and consistent progress over the course of a number of years.	The school is far from the goal(s) but has not been placed under registration review (SURR-School Under Registration Review) AND, if multiple data points are available, shows inconsistent progress.	School has been placed under registration review (SURR-School Under Registration Review).	BOCES/Dept of Ed/SED rosters of results

Sisulu's Accountability Plan (AP) absolute measures are: "The Academy's "Performance Index" (SPI) on the NYS ELA and Math Assessments (calculated to include those students enrolled for two or more years) will meet or exceed State Standards for public school performance during each year of the charter." The State standard is an SPI of 150. The following results appear in the Renewal Application (RA)

ELA

School Performance Index	
	2002
	2003
All students tested	104
2+ Years	113
	118
	115

Math

School Performance Index	
	2002
	2003
All students tested	56
2+ Years	56
	122

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In ELA, students in the school for less than two years were more likely in 2003 to score at Levels 3 & 4 than students in the school for more than two years. In math, the 2002 result includes eight percent (N=2) of the students scoring at Level 3. (Note: according to data from D of Ed, the SPI is 62.) An SPI below 80 would place Sisulu "furthest from state standards", a category used in SURR identification.

In addition to the absolute results on the State's fourth grade tests, Sisulu also reported the following results on NYC's third grade ELA and math tests.

	2002	2003
Percent Levels 3 & 4 ELA	28	37
Percent Levels 3 & 4 Math	20	30

These NYC third grade results show that the school made notable and consistent progress from 2002 to 2003.

With evidence limited to ELA results for two years and math results for one year, the school would be evaluated as **Limited development and/or partial implementation**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
1A.1.2 Absolute Measure (The school is making adequate yearly progress in meeting academic goals as defined by NCLB).	All students at the school, and all identified sub-groups, are making significant progress above and beyond adequate yearly progress.	Most students, and most identified sub-groups, at the school are making adequate yearly progress	Some students, and some identified sub-groups, at the school are making adequate yearly progress.	Few or no students or identified sub-groups are making adequate yearly progress.	Desk audit of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BOCES/Dept of Ed/SED rosters of results Application for renewal

Note: Under New York's NCLB accountability system, making adequate yearly progress, is determined by a school's School Performance Index (SPI) of students, taking the State eighth grade ELA and math tests. The SPI represents the proportion of full-year students attaining proficiency or at least partial proficiency on the State tests. The SPI is applied to an overall school results as well as to designated sub-populations within that school. SED annually sets a common SPI score for all public schools in the State.

This measure is not applicable at this time but will apply to the renewal consideration for school's seeking charter renewal in the future.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
1A.1.3 Comparative Measures (any New York State Assessment)	The school meets or exceeds the goal(s) as defined in the school's approved Accountability Plan over the five-year term of its charter.	The school approaches the goal(s) OR, if multiple data points are available, shows meaningful and consistent progress over the course of a number of years.	The school demonstrates mixed progress in meeting its goal(s) over the course of a number of years.	The school demonstrates little or no progress in meeting its goal(s) over the course of a number of years.	Similar schools analysis

Sisulu's Accountability Plan (AP) comparative measures are: "A greater percentage of Academy students enrolled in the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the NYS ELA and Mathematics Assessments than will students at similar schools.

In its AP, Sisulu compares itself to a SURR school (PS 180) and to a CSD 3 school (PS 149) with a substantial special education population (more than one third of the tested fourth graders in 2002). The following ELA results appear in the Renewal Application (RA). For the two years, Sisulu performed above one school and below the other. It performed below the district. Its gains were greater than the school which it outperformed, but below the other school and the district.

School / District	Sisulu Comparative ELA Results	
	2002	2003
Sisulu (2+Years)	26.1	36.1
PS 149	20.8	26.2
PS 180	32.8	43.8
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 5	30.1	41.9
		Gains
		10.0
		5.4
		11.0
		11.8

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The following mathematics results from the NYC Department of Education include all students tested at Sisulu. They indicate that for the two years, Sisulu performed below the comparison schools and the district. However, its gains were greater than one school and the district.

School / District	Sisulu Comparative Math Results (*)		
	Percent Levels 3 & 4		
	2002	2003	Gains
Sisulu	4	41	37
PS 149	32	46	14
PS 180	29	76	47
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 5	34	55	21

(*) ALL TESTED

In addition to these comparative results on the State's 4th grade tests, Sisulu also reported the following comparative results on NYC's 3rd grade ELA/math tests.

School / District	Percent Levels 3 & 4			
	ELA		Math	
	2002	2003	2002	2003
Sisulu	28	37	20	30
PS 149	25	29	23	42
PS 180	40	8	38	18
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 5		22		34

In 2003, the ELA results are better than any comparison and the math results are better than one school. The 2002 to 2003 gains are greater than any comparison.

While the school has shown progress, given the limitation of only two years of data, it can not be considered consistent. The school is evaluated as **Limited development and/or partial implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
1A.1.4 Value Added Measures	The school meets or exceeds the goal(s) as defined in the school’s approved Accountability Plan over the five-year term of its charter.	The school demonstrates strong and consistent progress in meeting its goal(s) over the course of a number of years and across grades.	The school demonstrates mixed progress in meeting its goal(s) over the course of a number of years and across grades.	The school demonstrates no progress in meeting its goal(s) over the course of a number of years and across grades.	Test publisher roster of results

Sisulu’s value-added measures as stated in the school’s Accountability Plan are: “Each cohort of Academy students will improve their reading and math skills by an average of 3 percentiles per year in national rank (NPR), according to the reading and math batteries of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Cohorts will include the scores of all eligible students, grades K – 5.” The school has achieved the following results:

ELA

Longitudinal Change in National Percentile Ranking on the ITBS standardized test			
	F99-Sp00	F00-Sp01	Sp01-Sp02
All students tested	2	5	(-4)
			(-16)

Cohort is defined as all students in the school for a year and for whom there are scores from data points at the beginning and end of the time period. Using this definition, Sisulu met the criterion once in four years. Using the grade-level cohort definition, applied elsewhere, the school would have met the criterion in 4 of 9 possible instances. Sisulu submitted an analysis of the 2002-03 results, showing that the second grade decline was three times greater than that of the other grades. The fifth grade met the criterion. The school did not provide data on the cumulative value-added for students who had attended the school throughout its charter. However, as an approximation, according to the cohort scores from fall 1999 and spring 2003, students in the school for four years from 1st to 4th grade showed a decline, while students in K to 3rd grade and 2nd to 5th grade showed expected from year-to-year growth.

Math

Longitudinal Change in NPR on ITBS			
	F99-Sp00	F00-Sp01	Sp01-Sp02
All students tested	5	13	(-9)
			(-10)

Again, defining cohort as all students in the school for a year and for whom there are scores from data points at the beginning and end of the time period, the school met the criterion twice in four years. Using the grade-level cohort definition, applied elsewhere, the school would have met the criterion in 6 of 11 possible instances. Sisulu submitted an analysis of the 2002-03 results, showing that the second grade decline was five times greater than that of the other grades.

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The third grade met the criterion. The school did not provide data on the cumulative value-added for students who had attended the school throughout its charter. However, as an approximation, according to the cohort scores from fall 1999 and spring 2003, students in the school for four years from K to 3rd grade and from 2nd to 5th grade showed expected progress year-to-year growth. Using spring to spring results only, students in the school for one year showed a gain of six percentile; for two years, a gain of four percentile; and for three years, a decline of four percentiles. Because the school did not administer the fourth grade test in spring 2002, the math value-added data are limited.

As supporting evidence to the analysis of the value-added outcome measure, Sisulu presents average percentile rank of all students tested in each grade each year. The ELA results show an overall increase in the average from year to year.

With evidence limited to ELA results for two years and math results for one year, the school would be evaluated as **Low level or no evidence of development.**

Rubric 1A.2 – Academic Attainment & Improvement – Internal Assessments

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1A.2.1 The school is making progress in meeting other measures of academic success as defined in the school’s Accountability Plan.</p>	<p>The school meets or exceeds the goal(s) as defined in the school’s approved Accountability Plan.</p>	<p>The school demonstrates strong and consistent progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<p>The school demonstrates mixed progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<p>The school demonstrates little or no progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roster of scores • Rubrics • scoring guides • accounting of development process

Sisulu’s Accountability Plan (AP) includes other measures of academic success in science and social studies as follows: “Sixty percent of the students enrolled at the Academy for three or more years will perform at or above grade level on the science and history-geography sections of the Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced Test administered to grades 1 to 6 every other year.”

In its charter renewal application, Sisulu states that the Core Knowledge Curriculum Referenced Tests are not appropriate instruments to assess student academic progress because they are not fully aligned to the respective New York State standards. Instead, Sisulu administered a substitute science test in which **53 percent** (47 of 89 fourth and fifth graders) passed the test; and a substitute social studies test in which **44 percent** of the students passed the test.

With evidence limited to results for one year in science and social studies because of the change in outcome measures, the school would be evaluated as **Low level or no evidence of development and implementation**

Rubric 1B – Use of Assessment Data

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1B.1 The school tracks student performance data to determine whether the school's academic goals are being achieved.</p>	<p>The school invests extra resources so that student academic data can be carefully collected, recorded and analyzed in order to meet school goals. The school actively communicates and presents school wide data to staff, parents, the district, and other community members.</p>	<p>The school collects, records, and analyzes student academic data each year to determine success in meeting school goals. The school wide data is communicated to staff, parents, the district, and other community members.</p>	<p>The school collects and records student academic data, but such data are not organized and are not analyzed regularly. School wide data is occasionally communicated to staff, parents, the district, and other community members.</p>	<p>The school has no system for collecting and recording student academic data. Teachers never receive longitudinal data on students. School wide data is rarely communicated to staff, parents, the district, and other community members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability Plan • Professional development offerings • Board of trustees meeting minutes • Interviews

During the first four years of the school's charter, Sisulu's teachers and education service provider, Victory Schools, worked together to track classroom assessments conducted as a component of the Direct Instruction reading program that was originally part of the school's design. Teachers administered tests to assess student progress and the results were compiled by Victory personnel and returned to teachers with suggestions for student advancement and/or remediation. While this student performance data was used to move students through reading levels in Direct Instruction, the school's former principal and teachers did not look at student performance on the Direct Instruction assessments in combination with student performance on externally verified standardized assessments including the New York State assessments at 4th grade, nor did the school use these internal assessments to track the progress of identifiable groups (i.e. girls vs. boys, special education students, etc.). As such, this data was not used to determine the school's progress toward the goals in its accountability plan.

The school is in the nascent stages of using the New York State assessment 4th grade writing rubric with students. The school's new principal plans to lead professional development personnel from Victory and elsewhere in assisting teachers in the creation of periodic student writing assessments that will be evaluated by staff using the standards required in the 4th grade writing rubric.

Over the course of its charter, Sisulu tracked student achievement as outlined under the Direct Instruction component included in the school's original charter. The school presented evidence of monitoring student progress through Direct Instruction lessons that included data on grades 1, 2, and 3 in the 2001-2002 school year and in grade 2 during the 2002-2003 school year. The school did not examine the progress of students through Direct Instruction lessons on a grade level or school wide basis nor did it examine how such progress correlated to performance on standardized tests or the goals set forth in its accountability plan. No other

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systemic, school wide attempts to analyze student work products or performance as a measure of the school's progress toward attaining accountability plan goals was evident.

During the fourth year of Sisulu's charter the Sisulu Board of Trustee, lead by its Academic Committee, instituted a review of the school's educational design that included a review of student performance on standardized tests, progress toward accountability plan goals, classroom instruction, and the strength of the school design as proposed in Sisulu's original charter application. The Sisulu Board found the instructional design and its delivery in classrooms lacking and made promising changes in both instructional leadership and curriculum delivery.

The school is considered **Limited development and/or partial implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
1B.1.2 The school uses assessments to ensure that the state performance standards are being met.	Internal assessments are clearly aligned with state performance standards. This alignment is well documented and comprehensive.	Internal assessments are aligned with state performance standards.	Internal assessments are partially aligned with state performance standards.	Internal assessments are not aligned with state performance standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability Plan • Professional development offerings • Board of trustees meeting minutes • Interviews

Sisulu used internal assessments of student progress included in the Direct Instruction component of its original charter design and provided evidence of such for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school year. Teachers administered weekly assessments that tracked the rate at which student independently and successfully progressed through Direct Instruction reading and math units. The school’s education service provider, Victory Schools, compiled this data and provided teachers weekly reports of each child’s progress. Victory also provided teachers assistance in diagnosing the individual learning needs of students and determining if students required additional lessons in particular skills as well as in identifying students who’s skills were strong enough to accelerate through lessons.

In grades 3, 4, and 5, Sisulu utilized the assessments included as a part of the Scott Foresman reading and mathematics series used at the school. While these assessments are aligned with the state performance standards, no evidence was available to show that the school’s principal or teachers gathered and analyzed student performance on these assessments during the first four years of its charter to ensure student progress toward attaining the skills and knowledge required in the state assessments.

Sisulu’s current principal is well versed in the use and analysis of student performance as a tool to improve teaching and learning. She works with teachers not only to expand their understanding of the quality of student work required by state standards, but also to increase teachers’ instructional strategies and proficiencies, especially in English/Language Arts and Mathematics.

The school is considered **Limited development and/or partial implementation**.

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1B.1.3 The school uses assessment and evaluation data to improve student learning and instructional effectiveness.</p>	<p>School administration and teachers interpret and analyze assessment results in order to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, leading to improved student learning. Teachers and administrators actively communicate about assessment results on an ongoing basis in order to improve student learning.</p>	<p>School administration and teachers interpret and analyze assessment results in order to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, leading to improved student learning.</p>	<p>School administration and teachers sometimes interpret and analyze assessment results in order to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, leading to improved student learning.</p>	<p>School administration and teachers rarely or never interpret and analyze assessment results in order to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, in order to improve student learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability Plan • Professional development offerings • Board of trustees meeting minutes • Interviews

Sisulu's education service provider, Victory Schools, provided the school with a mid-year report documenting the school's progress in moving students through Direct Instruction assessments. Both teachers and Victory personnel report that the school's previous principals did not share this information with staff in order to improve student learning and instructional effectiveness.

Sisulu uses an Academic Intervention Plan to modify and focus instruction for students the school determines in need of increased academic assistance. Students are identified by individual teachers and through analysis of scores in the Direct Instruction program and on standardized tests. The school provided an outline of these plans but was not able to provide examples of current plans and not all teachers were aware of the process.

During a follow up visit to the school in early December 2003, Institute staff found evidence that teachers are giving weekly and monthly assessments in English Language Arts and mathematics. These assessments are designed at the school and directly linked to the skills and knowledge demanded by the state performance standards. Teachers keep and analyze records of student performance on these tests as one indicator of student progress in attaining state performance standards.

The school is considered **Limited development and/or partial implementation**.

Rubric 1C - Curriculum

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1C.1 The school aligns its academic program with its mission and goals.</p>	<p>The school actively ensures that the academic program clearly supports the school’s mission and goals.</p>	<p>The academic program clearly supports and is derived from the school’s mission and goals.</p>	<p>The academic program sometimes supports and is derived from the school’s mission and goals.</p>	<p>There is no alignment between the school’s academic program and mission and goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection.

The mission of Sisulu Children’s Academy – Harlem Public charter school is “to become one of the finest public schools in America and to produce students who meet or exceed the New York State standards. The Academy is built on the philosophy that all children can learn. The Academy will focus on student achievement in the critical core skills of reading, math, and language by offering more total time on learning, a higher degree of individualized instruction, and a highly innovative, research proven academic curriculum.”

The school’s original curriculum design, as presented in its charter application, focused on core skill acquisition through the use of Direct Instruction in reading and mathematics and the use of the Core Knowledge curriculum for history, language, and science. The use of Direct Instruction provided student placement in classrooms or learning groups where instruction was focused on individual student needs. The school’s Balanced Literacy curriculum (derived from state writing standards and the Core Knowledge Sequence) provided the opportunity to expose students to rigorous content in world civilizations, United States history, and science. While the original curriculum design (or plan of study) outlined many demanding subject areas and skills, the school was slow to institute the instructional program necessary to ensure it produced students “who meet or exceed the New York State standards.”

In the fall of 2002, the school's board analyzed student academic performance data and determined the lack of strong performance required a critical review of the school's curriculum. The product of that review is a curriculum that is modified and strengthened from that proposed in the school's original charter. The school's current curriculum design is as follows:

English Language Arts:

1. A two hour block of English Language Arts instruction for all students every day;
2. Implementation of the Scott Foresman Reading Program that provides greater strength in addressing all of New York state's English Language Arts performance standards;
3. Use of the National Writing Project and Great Source Writing Program to gird the instructional program in writing;
4. Use of literature books to augment reading instruction;
5. Use of assessments that include unit and end of year tests that provide both on-going and end of year student achievement data;
6. The use of Direct Instruction with targeted students in grades K-2 to provide additional support in the acquisition of basic reading skills.

Mathematics:

1. The use of Everyday Mathematics that is aligned with the New York state learning standards in mathematics. This implementation to be supported by an in school staff developer to assist teachers in providing rigorous learning opportunities in math.

These curriculum modifications, along with the continuing use of the Core Knowledge curriculum for history, social studies, and science, provide the school with a curriculum that is well aligned with its mission and goals. As such, the school is considered to be at a **fully functioning or operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>IC.2 The school has a clearly defined, quality curriculum in place.</p>	<p>The essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve are identified and given priority within each content area of the curriculum. Student achievement in these areas receives the highest focus at the school. Course offerings and outlines reflect an organized, cohesive curricular design that is aligned with the school's mission and philosophy.</p>	<p>The essential knowledge and skills that all student are expected to achieve are identified and given priority within the curriculum. Student achievement in these areas is a focus at the school. Course offerings and outlines reflect an organized, cohesive curricular design that is aligned with the school's mission and philosophy.</p>	<p>The essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to know are sometimes identified within the curriculum and student achievement is uneven. Course offerings and outlines partially reflect a mission-driven, organized curricular design.</p>	<p>There is little or no evidence to identify essential knowledge and skills and student achievement is poor. The curriculum is not cohesive and does not reflect the school's mission or philosophy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection.

As discussed above, the school's curriculum aligns with the New York state learning standards and outlines the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve. These areas, specifically in English Language Arts and mathematics, are a priority in each content area. The school's new leader, its board, and its staff place singular priority on student improvement in these areas as evidenced by classroom instructional plans, observations, and interviews. The school continues to work toward ensuring that instruction is organized and cohesive through a variety of professional development strategies. Significantly, the school's new principal has demonstrated success throughout her career in creating schools where classroom instruction is robust and cohesive. At the time of the renewal visit, the quality of Sisulu's curriculum had been enhanced by the board's review earlier in the school's charter, and the school's strong instructional leadership and enthusiastic classroom staff were striving to fully implement its components.

During a follow up visit to the school in December of 2003, Institute staff reviewed student writing, science reports, and observed mathematics, science and literature instruction. This review and observation showed the school continues to set high expectations for student work and that instruction is well aligned with the demands of New York state performance standards.

The school is considered to be at the **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Rubric 1D - Pedagogy

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>ID.1 The curriculum is effectively implemented in the school.</p>	<p>The school has a comprehensive plan for curriculum implementation that facilitates the alignment of instructional methodology, learning activities, instructional resources and support, and assessments. Adequate teacher planning and development time is allocated so that coordination of the curriculum leads to a common understanding and vision for student learning held by all teachers.</p>	<p>In implementing the curriculum, the school focuses on aligning instructional methodology, learning activities, instructional resources and support, and assessments. The coordination of the curriculum leads to a common understanding and vision for student learning held by all teachers.</p>	<p>The school's implementation plan for curriculum is only partially developed and there is not full alignment of instructional methodology, learning activities, instructional resources and support, and assessments. Efforts to coordinate curriculum are made, but do not lead to a shared vision for student learning.</p>	<p>There is limited or no evidence that the school has a plan to effectively implement and align its curriculum. Few or no efforts are made to coordinate curriculum across the grade levels or subject areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Sisulu's record of effective curriculum implementation has been mixed over the life of its charter. Early in the life of the school, Institute reports provide evidence of a strong focus on curriculum implementation that resulted in high expectations for all students. Instructional strategies and learning activities were aligned, with effective Core Knowledge lessons in the areas of American history and world civilization studies. During the third and fourth years of the school's charter this focus and alignment were not as evident. A review of reports by both the Institute and the State Education Department as well as on interviews conducted during the renewal visit show the school faced the additional burdens of teacher turnover and poor instructional leadership during the middle years of its five year charter term.

The school's current principal is a proven instructional leader with a strong understanding of curriculum. She observes classes throughout the school day and has instituted weekly professional development sessions with teachers to ensure the curriculum is properly implemented. Teachers meet weekly as a staff and have

time in their daily schedule devoted to common planning time. Classrooms are adequately supplied; interviews with teachers as well as a review of classroom curriculum plans reflect a strong commitment to the school's newly revised curriculum. However, instructional practices observed during the renewal visit reveal the school's teachers have a clear understanding of the curriculum but vary in the strength of their instructional consistent and strong methodology. Student work examined during the renewal visit confirms this. The school faces the challenge of ensuring its teaching staff develops the strong and consistent instructional skills that ensure effective delivery of its curriculum.

During a follow up visit to the school in December 2003, Institute staff observed strong instruction in a number of the school's classes. Most notable were two literature classes where in students were reading, analyzing, and discussing a novel with the entire class. In addition to displaying remarkable academic focus and impressive behavior, students read aloud with fluency and understanding, identified character and literary traits used by the author, and articulated predictions and analysis of the text. Strong use of interesting and challenging vocabulary as well as thoughtful analysis of the literature citing specific passages in the texts were hallmarks of the lessons observed.

The school is considered to be **Limited development and/or partial implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>ID.2 Quality instruction is promoted through the fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning.</p>	<p>School leadership works actively and deliberately to foster an academic environment where teaching and learning are valued and supported. All staff, board members and parents share a clear and strong focus on instructional goals. Classroom practice reflects rigorous teaching and instructional strategies that engage students. Student and staff accomplishments are frequently recognized and honored.</p>	<p>School leadership has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are valued and supported; there is a clear and strong focus on instructional goals; and student and staff accomplishments are recognized. Classroom practice reflects competent teaching and instructional strategies that engage students.</p>	<p>School leadership has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are sometimes valued and supported. Not all staff members have a clear and strong focus on instructional goals. Classroom practice reflects teaching and instructional strategies that are usually appropriate and student engagement suffers. Student and staff accomplishments are occasionally recognized.</p>	<p>School leadership has not established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are valued and supported; the school lacks a clear and strong focus on instructional goals; and student and staff accomplishments are rarely recognized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Sisulu's efforts to create academically focused classrooms have varied over the life of its charter. Institute visit reports generated over the life of the school's charter, as well as the school's 3rd year visit report from the State Education Department, show inconsistencies in the school's ability to develop a learning environment sufficient to allow the school to reach the academic goals in its accountability plan. While some teachers established classrooms with a strong focus on instructional goals and with instructional practices that maximize the educational attainment of children, Institute and State Education Department visitors also found classrooms where teaching was weak and void of the rigor necessary to enable students to succeed in meeting state learning and performance standards.

At the time of the renewal visit, Institute staff again found variation in the instructional abilities of classroom teachers. Each teacher in the school, however, relayed a detailed understanding of the instructional challenges facing the school. In addition, teachers reported confidence in the school's current principal.

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Teachers reflect enthusiasm about the instructional practices the principal is inculcating in all of Sisulu's classrooms and have devoted a significant amount of time and energy toward establishing the practices required for the school to fully reach its academic goals.

During a follow up visit in December 2003, Institute staff found evidence that the school's instructional program continues to gain strength. Classroom observations show teachers continue to strengthen and refine instructional practices. The results of which are lessons where students are engaged and active participants in literature analysis, process writing, and mathematical computation. Academically rich, intellectually stimulating lessons were the norm during the follow up visit.

The school is considered to be a **limited development and/or partial implementation level.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1D.3 The school has strategies in place to meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure or students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals.</p>	<p>The school has implemented special programs/resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are successful in helping students meet goals.</p>	<p>The school has implemented special programs/resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are usually successful in helping students meet goals.</p>	<p>The school has implemented special programs/resources to help students who are struggling academically; however, the success rate is not high.</p>	<p>The school has no special programs/resources to help students who are struggling academically.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Students in need of skill development are identified as at risk of academic failure through analysis of internal assessments and classroom teacher observation. At the time of the renewal visit, Sisulu employed one Title I teacher to serve specific needs of at risk students and was seeking to employ a second. Due to the lack of staff, the school's principal determined that existing Title I teacher's services would be maximized by focusing delivery of services on eligible 4th grade students. The school's targeted assistance program includes a "push-in/pull-out" program where staff focuses additional instruction for 5th grade students in need of additional skill development. In this model, the Title I teacher coordinates with fifth grade teachers to assist in small group lessons both within the classroom and meeting with small groups of identified students to supplement classroom instruction. 3rd grade students attend after school tutoring programs that are designed to target specific skills and areas in which students require academic improvement. These programs have been designed under the leadership of the school's current principal and are in the beginning stages of implementation. Standardized assessment scores of students show that, over the lifetime of Sisulu's charter, the school has found success in assisting students at risk of academic failure in achieving at high levels.

During the Institute's follow up visit in December 2003, Sisulu provided additional evidence of strategies in place to meet the needs of at risk students. Specifically, the school has expanded the after school tutoring program to include students at all grade levels. In addition, commencing on the first Saturday in

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December, Sisulu offers students a 3 hour program focused on English Language Arts, science, social studies and mathematics. Within the first week of notices going out regarding this program, 56 parents elected to sign their children up for attendance.

The school is determined to be at **limited development and/or partial implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1D.4 The school has strategies in place to meet the needs of English Language Learners.</p>	<p>The school has a successful program in place to meet the needs of any English Language Learners who enroll at the school. All ELL students meet school goals.</p>	<p>The school has a program in place to meet the needs of any English Language Learners who enroll at the school. Most ELL students meet school goals.¹⁵</p>	<p>The school has a program in place to meet the needs of English Language Learners who enroll at the school. Some ELL students meet school goals.</p>	<p>The school has at least one English Language Learner at the school, but does not have an established program in place to meet ELL student needs. Or, a program is in place but very few ELL students meet school goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

No English Language Learners have chosen to enroll at Sisulu. As the school does not at this time serve students in need of this service, this rubric is not applicable.

¹⁵ If the school does not have a program they have a legal responsibility to go to the district and request a meeting to discuss the student’s program.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>ID.5 The school has strategies in place to meet the Section 504 needs of students.</p>	<p>All of the school staff clearly understand Section 504 requirements and readily implement them for students needing a 504 Plan. These students are successful in meeting school goals.</p>	<p>The school can accommodate the needs of students with 504 Plans. These are successful in meeting school goals.¹⁶</p>	<p>The school can only partially accommodate the 504 needs of students. Most students with 504 Plans are unsuccessful in meeting school goals.</p>	<p>The school is unable to accommodate the 504 needs of students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Students in need of section 504 services have not chosen to enroll at Sisulu. As such, this rubric is not applicable.

¹⁶ If the school does not have a program they have a legal responsibility to go to the district Committee on Special Education (the “CSE”) and request a meeting to discuss the need for an Individualized Education Program (the “IEP”) or a 504 Plan.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>ID.6 Strategies are in place to ensure that students with disabilities are making progress in meeting IEP and school goals.</p>	<p>The school has effective strategies in place to ensure that all students with disabilities are making reasonable progress towards meeting school goals and IEP goals according to annual IEP reviews.</p>	<p>The school has strategies in place to ensure that most special education students are making reasonable progress towards meeting school goals and IEP goals according to annual IEP reviews.</p>	<p>The school employs some strategies that assist special education students in making progress towards meeting school goals and IEP goals according to annual IEP reviews.</p>	<p>Few or no special education students are making progress towards meeting school goals and IEP goals according to annual IEP reviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Review of Institute records regarding charter amendments. • Review of curricular materials during the renewal inspection. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Over the life of the school's charter, it has had mixed success in creating a viable special education program. The State Education Department's 3rd year report stated that Sisulu's "special education services are not adequately providing for the academic needs of the large number of struggling students" (page 5).

At the time of the renewal visit, Sisulu had some strategies in place to assist students in achieving the goals contained in their Individual Education Program as required under IDEA. The school has yet to create an effective infrastructure to support a special education program that ensures students successfully meet all Individual Education Program goals. While advertising for a qualified special education administrator for the building, the school had one qualified Special Education teacher at the time of the renewal visit.

At a follow up visit in December 2003, the school's principal relayed that all 19 students with IEPs at Sisulu were receiving appropriate services. The school is working with the district of residence with two students in an attempt to ensure the one on one paraprofessional requirements in each child's IEPs are met appropriately.

Based on this evidence the school is considered to be at **limited development and/or partial implementation**.

Rubric 1E – Student Order & Discipline

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1E.1 The school is a positive learning environment for all stakeholders.</p>	<p>All stakeholders agree that the school is a positive learning environment, and Institute visit documents confirm this.</p>	<p>Most stakeholders agree that the school is a positive learning environment, and Institute visit documents confirm this.</p>	<p>Some stakeholders agree that the school is a positive learning environment, and Institute visit documents confirm this.</p>	<p>Few stakeholders agree that the school is a positive learning environment, and Institute visit documents confirm this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Renewal inspection classroom observations

Evidence in annual visit reports shows that, over the lifetime of its charter, Sisulu has created a school where learning is valued. During the renewal visit, classroom observations revealed a strong focus on teaching and learning with minimal classroom disruptions.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1E.2 The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning.</p>	<p>The school has consistently enforced, documented discipline policies and procedures and keeps appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions. The discipline policy promotes calm, safe classrooms where all students feeling secure in taking risks to promote their learning.</p>	<p>The school has documented discipline policies and procedures and keeps appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions. The discipline policy promotes calm, safe classrooms where most students feeling secure in taking risks to promote their learning.</p>	<p>The school has documented discipline policies and procedures and keeps appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions. Classrooms do not always feel calm and safe, and many students do not feel comfortable taking risks to promote their learning.</p>	<p>The school does not have documented policies and procedures and does not keep appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports. • Renewal inspection classroom observations • Interviews • Current written policies

Sisulu has had mixed results in implementing discipline policies and procedures that effectively promote learning over the life of its charter. Student handbooks from previous years outlined the school's discipline policies and procedures however a student & parent handbook for the current year had yet to be finalized and distributed. A review of records shows that adequate records regarding expulsions and suspensions are kept.

Visit reports from the Institute in the early years of the school's charter state that, "The school climate is positive and reinforces teaching and learning." (Charter School Institute End of Year Visit Report 00-01). A report prepared for the Institute by Schoolworks, LLC, stated that there appeared to be high standards for student behavior, as the team observed classroom behavior that was generally on task and organized, creating a sense of order and purpose in the classroom. Teachers noted that not all days are as orderly as the visit revealed (page 6) "According to teachers, there are major inconsistencies in the student discipline system. According to the school documents, Sisulu adopted a standard code of conduct, but concerns have arisen about the ability of school leaders to promptly and consistently address seriously and persistently disruptive students." (page 8)

At the time of the renewal visit, classrooms focused on academics and suffered from minimal disruption. Classrooms and hallways were safe and well monitored by the school's staff. Institute staff noted, however, that students were keenly aware of the purpose of the renewal visit and reflected that awareness by asking Institute visitors to not close the school. Institute staff found evidence of discipline procedures used in some classrooms, but no evidence of systematic school wide discipline routines that promote learning was in place.

The school is found to be at **limited development and/or partial implementation**.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>IE.3 The school has discipline policies and procedures for special education students.</p>	<p>All teachers and the administrative staff understand that discipline procedures are often different for special education students. The school complies with federal and state requirements pertaining to the discipline of special education students.</p>	<p>Teachers and the administrative staff understand that discipline procedures are often different for special education students. The school complies with federal and state requirements pertaining to the discipline of special education students.</p>	<p>Some teachers and the administrative staff understand that discipline procedures are often different for special education students. The school partially complies with federal and state requirements pertaining to the discipline of special education students.</p>	<p>Few teachers and the administrative staff understand that discipline procedures are often different for special education students. The school does not comply with federal and state requirements pertaining to the discipline of special education students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit / inspection reports • NYSED compliance visit report • Renewal inspection classroom observations • Interviews • Current written policies

The school's principal has a clear understanding of the requirements of Special Education discipline procedures, though at the time of the renewal visit the school's current Special Education teacher did not possess adequate knowledge regarding the discipline of students with disabilities. The school's policies for disciplining Special Education students were included in its 2002-2003 parent and student handbook. As mentioned above, at the time of the renewal visit, the handbook had not been updated or provided to parents for the 2003-2004 school year.

The school is considered to be at **limited development and /or partial implementation**.

Note: The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has ultimate responsibility for determining compliance in this area. See the NYSED compliance visit report that was completed in the school's third year of the charter.

Rubric 1F – Professional Development

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1F.1 Time is made available throughout the year for planning and professional development.</p>	<p>Both the school day and the annual calendar reflect a high priority given to professional development and planning. Teachers feel they are given enough time for professional development and planning.</p>	<p>The school offers several professional development days throughout the school year, but teachers feel they could use more time for planning.</p>	<p>The school offers very few professional development days throughout the school year, and teachers do not feel they have enough time for ongoing development and planning.</p>	<p>The school does not offer professional development days for teachers and little to no time is allocated in the daily schedule for teacher development and planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter application • School professional development plan or other related documents. • Accountability Plan • School visit/inspection reports. • Accountability Progress Reports • Renewal inspection Report • Interviews

As with a number of charter schools, Sisulu experienced a high rate of faculty turnover. As noted in previous Institute reports, this turnover increases the need for additional training and instructional mentoring. In addition, it places burdens on a school’s finances and instructional leadership. The school’s education service provider, Victory Schools, has made training available for new faculty prior to the start of each school year and has supported the three individuals who have served as Sisulu’s principal over the life of the charter by providing additional professional development training during the school year. The rate of staff turnover has diminished Sisulu’s ability to sustain a consistency of quality instruction

The school’s current principal is a proven instructional leader who has implemented a focused series of professional development opportunities both before the school year began and in after school training sessions. She communicates a strong commitment to the school’s curriculum, has inculcated this commitment to

the teaching staff, and works with teachers to develop rigorous instructional skills. Time is made available each instructional day for teacher meetings and staff meets weekly with the principal to learn and acquire new instructional skills.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1F.2 The school provides professional development that is aligned with the school's mission, helps teachers meet school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning.</p>	<p>Professional development offerings are aligned with the school's educational philosophy, are effective in helping teachers better meet the school's mission and goals, and address any identified shortcomings in student achievement.</p>	<p>Professional development offerings are aligned with the school's educational philosophy, are usually effective in helping teachers better meet the school's mission and goals, and usually address any identified shortcomings in student achievement.</p>	<p>Professional development offerings are sometimes aligned with the school's educational philosophy and are occasionally effective in helping teachers better meet the school's mission and goals.</p>	<p>Professional development offerings are not aligned with the school's educational philosophy and are ineffective in helping teachers better meet the school's mission and goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter application • School professional development plan or other related documents. • Accountability Plan • School visit/inspection reports. • Accountability Progress Reports • Renewal inspection Report • Interviews

As noted above, the school's current principal has a strong command of the professional development offerings required to effectively implement the instructional strategies necessary to create classrooms that assist students in meeting the goals outlined in the school's accountability plan. The school presented a strong professional development plan that focused on core academic areas (reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history) as well as in using student performance data to inform instruction, and standards based instructional strategies. The principal provided a written needs assessment survey to teachers. She compiled and analyzed that data to construct the ongoing professional development she provides to individual teachers and the entire staff on a weekly basis.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>1F.3 Extra support is in place to support new and uncertified teachers.</p>	<p>The school has implemented an ongoing formal process that is effective in meeting the needs of new and uncertified teachers.</p>	<p>The school offers a formal professional development process for new and uncertified teachers, but it is not ongoing.</p>	<p>The school offers some informal supports to new and uncertified teachers, though these teachers do not feel it is adequate.</p>	<p>The school offers no extra support or guidance for new and uncertified teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter application • School professional development plan or other related documents. • Accountability Plan • School visit/inspection reports. • Accountability Progress Reports • Renewal inspection Report • Interviews

The school's strong professional development opportunities extend to its new teachers. In addition to the professional development offerings made available to all teaching staff, the school's principal spends time in new teachers' classrooms. Teachers report her personal professional development visits to classrooms are frequent, and provide beneficial tips on implementing successful instructional practices.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Renewal Question 2 – Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Rubric 2A – School Specific Non-Academic Goals

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2A.1 The school is making progress in meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes as defined in the school's Accountability Plan.</p>	<p>The school meets or exceeds the goal(s) as defined in the school's approved Accountability Plan.</p>	<p>The school demonstrates strong and consistent progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<p>The school demonstrates mixed progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<p>The school demonstrates no progress in meeting its goal(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability Plan • Accountability progress reports • School visit/inspection reports. • Strategic plan, newsletters, discipline policy etc. • Interviews

Sisulu's unique measures of non-academic student outcomes include knowledge and appreciation of art and music. Specifically, Sisulu has as its outcome measure that 70 percent of parents responding that the school has done a good or outstanding job in improving their child's knowledge and appreciation of art and music. The school's renewal application indicates that in the past two years the vast majority of responding parents was at least satisfied with their child's development in art and music. However, a since only a very small proportion of the parents responded each year, the outcome has limited importance for the general satisfaction of parents, or their perceptions about the art and music programs.

Under the school's unique programmatic area of strength of character and concern for others, Sisulu has as its outcome measure that "90 percent of students will participate in civics projects that improve their knowledge of their communities, as measured by their writing and demonstration activities reflected in student journals and class-wide portfolios developed for all major project activities." While the renewal application lists a variety of activities in which students participated in the past four years, students did not generate work products as a result of their participation, as called for in the outcome measure. Without this evidence, it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the civics projects.

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Under the same goal developing strength of character and concern for others, Sisulu has an outcome measure that 70 percent of parents will report that their child's growth in responsibility, self-control, and concern for others has been at least good. Notwithstanding the poor response rate, the parents were affirmative. A related measure on teacher perceptions of student behavior did not meet criterion established in the accountability plan.

Another unique measure defined in Sisulu's accountability plan is that the actual and proposed budgets for each school year will show proper allocation of resources to ensure effective school programs. Expenses have exceeded revenues in each of the first four years of the school's operation. In addition, one of Sisulu's goals include yearly balance sheets that show the school is fiscally sound and maintains adequate cash flow. As the school's education service provider has written off the management fee owed by the school, the school has been unable to meet this goal (See 3.2 below for further information.)

Finally, the school set a goal stating yearly submission of audited financial statements would demonstrate that the school had behaved responsibly and prudently with public resources. The school's three years of audited financial statements and all audits indicate the school has accurately presented its financial position in each of those years.

Based on this evidence, the school is deemed to have **limited development and/or partial implementation**.

Rubric 2B – Faithfulness to Charter

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2B.1 The school is faithful to its mission.</p>	<p>All school stakeholders demonstrate a strong awareness and understanding of the school's mission. Its governance and instructional practices strongly and consistently reflect that mission.</p>	<p>Most school stakeholders demonstrate awareness of the mission and its governance and instructional practices generally reflect the mission.</p>	<p>Many stakeholders are not aware of the mission. It is infrequently supported by governance and instructional practices.</p>	<p>Few, if any, stakeholders are aware of the school's mission and it is rarely, if at all, reflected in the daily life of the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit/inspection reports. • Accountability Progress Reports • Renewal inspection report • School summary document (extracted from school's charter) • Interviews

In its charter application, Sisulu identified the following components of its mission:

- ✓ Create one of the finest schools in America;
- ✓ Create a role model for charter public school design
- ✓ Improve student learning and achievement through Direct Instruction, Core Knowledge, and thematic curricula;
- ✓ Increase learning for all students with an emphasis on children at risk of academic failure;
- ✓ Use different and innovative teaching methods;
- ✓ Increase professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other personnel;
- ✓ Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- ✓ Institute a change from a rule-based to performance based accountability system.

Sisulu's board of trustees, principal, and teachers are all familiar with the challenging goals contained in the school's mission. However, the school has yet to meet its goal of being one of the finest schools in America. The Sisulu board has taken a strong role in analyzing the successes and challenges the school has met during the term of its first charter by engaging in a thorough analysis of student performance, classroom instruction, building leadership, and the strength of the services provided by its education service provider, Victory Schools. Using the goals outlined above, the board made significant modifications in the day to day practices of the school that include curriculum adjustments, hiring a principal with proven success at creating one of the finest schools in District 4, and placed a renewed focus on increasing student academic achievement. The schools governance practices clearly reflect the school's mission. Continued support of the school's new principal and teaching staff hold the promise that Sisulu is likely to fulfill the elements of its mission it has not yet attained. As such, the school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2B.2 The school has implemented key design elements of its charter.</p>	<p>The school has successfully implemented all key design elements.</p>	<p>The school has successfully implemented the majority of key design elements.</p>	<p>The school has successfully implemented an inadequate portion of the key design elements. The elements it has implemented have been implemented haphazardly, incompletely, or unsuccessfully.</p>	<p>The school has implemented none or almost none of the key design elements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visit/inspection reports. • Accountability Progress Reports • Renewal inspection report • School summary document [extracted from school’s charter] • Interviews

The key design elements included in Sisulu’s charter are:

- The Sisulu Children’s Academy curriculum combines three mutually reinforcing educational approaches: Direct Instruction, Core Knowledge, and a creative thematic curricula
- The Sisulu Children’s Academy will employ Direct Instruction for reading, math, and (English) language instruction. Teachers using Direct Instruction are extensively trained and coached by expert facilitators on the proper way to pace and present these lessons for maximum effectiveness.
- Built-in assessments and lesson sequences designed for Core Knowledge Curricula will be used to monitor student performance in history, science, and geography.
- The thematic curricula is used in the after school program to allow the practice of new skills through creative activities. This enrichment unit combines reading, math, art, dance, music, computer play, and field trips in the lessons.

Sisulu has implemented a majority of its design elements. Specifically the school used Direct Instruction, Core Knowledge, creative thematic curricula, and regular assessments of student progress during the first four years of its charter. The strength of those design elements in increasing student learning and achievement was not enough in the analysis of the school’s board of trustees. While Direct Instruction was implemented at the school, the board found that it did not prove strong enough in the third year of the school’s charter to assist students in achieving the academic level expected by the board. As such, the school

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modified its curriculum to strengthen reading instruction by changing to the Scott-Foresman reading program. The school maintained its commitment to a strong Core Knowledge component, strengthened its writing program, and adopted Everyday Mathematics with a focus on quickening the pace at which student learning and achievement would grow.

Based on its analysis of key design element implementation, the board successfully preserved areas that were helping the schools meet its goals (Core Knowledge curriculum, regular assessment of student progress, thematic instruction) and made strategic modifications to those elements that had not proven successful in increasing student learning and achievement.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Governance

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.1 The board and school leadership are familiar with the school design and work to implement it effectively.</p>	<p>Administrators and board members have a strong understanding of the school design and refer to it regularly in managing and governing the school. The board and the school's administration deploy resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school.</p>	<p>Administrators and board members understand the school design. The board and administration deploy resources that further the academic and organizational success of the school.</p>	<p>Most board members and school administrators understand the school's design. The school's deployment of resources at times contributes to the academic and organizational success of the school.</p>	<p>There is little or no evidence that the school's board and administration understand the school's design or that they work to deploy resources in a way that supports the academic and organizational work of the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and Procedures • Interviews • Newsletters

The school's board and its administrative team have a strong understanding of the school's program design in the fifth year of its charter. The board's academic program committee was instrumental in reviewing and assessing the academic program in the fall of 2002. That review resulted in the redesign of the school's curriculum and instructional program. The board then worked to find a school leader who could effectively implement the design. Through interviews and observations, it is clear that the board's commitment to the school's leader extends to providing her the resources and administrative freedom required for her to lead effective implementation of the school's program while retaining appropriate forms of board oversight.

The school is considered to be at **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School Renewal Report

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.2 The board has provided financial oversight and made sound financial decisions furthering the school's mission, program and goals.</p>	<p>The board has had mechanisms to review the school's finances and has used those mechanisms consistently, including an active finance and audit committee. The board has regularly discussed, researched and reviewed its fiscal responsibilities. Where deficiencies have been found, the board has required prompt and thorough remedial action and the deficiencies have been cured.</p> <p>The board has without significant exception made sound financial decisions furthering the school's mission, program and goals.</p>	<p>The board has had mechanisms to review the school's finances and has generally used those mechanisms. The board generally discussed, researched and reviewed its fiscal responsibilities. Where deficiencies have existed, the board has taken remedial action and such actions have cured the deficiencies.</p> <p>The board has generally made sound financial decisions furthering the school's mission, program and goals; where it has not, the consequences have not been strongly negative as to the school's mission, program and goals.</p>	<p>The board has had limited or incomplete or inconsistent mechanisms through which it exercised fiscal oversight. The board has only sporadically discussed, researched and reviewed its fiscal responsibilities. Where deficiencies have existed, the board has taken limited remedial action and such action has not always been effective in curing the deficiencies identified.</p> <p>The board has more often than not made unsound financial decisions and/or the unsound financial decisions have been strongly negative as to the school's mission, program and goals.</p>	<p>The board has had few if any mechanisms for fiscal oversight. The board has not discussed its fiscal responsibilities and has been unaware of them. The board has not taken meaningful steps to correct identified deficiencies.</p> <p>The board's financial decisions have imperiled the school's viability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-laws • Policies and Procedures • Interviews • Board minutes

The Sisulu board of trustees has provided financial oversight and made sound financial decisions furthering the school's mission, program and goals. The strength of the board's financial oversight increased as the school has matured over the term of the school's charter.

A review of the board minutes for the last four years indicates limited activity and oversight over financial issues on the part of the board. The Finance Committee was not established until January 2002. Prior to that time, the board had a few discussions about specific financial issues. Since that time, there have been more regular discussions of financial matters, but the process is still weak. For example, there does not appear to be a regular, formal Finance Committee report at each board meeting where updated financial statements and/or budget updates are presented, reviewed and approved by the Board. This would be

evidence that the board is engaged in the school's fiscal matter and monitoring them on a regular basis. There is also limited evidence of an annual budget development and approval process for the board. A budget was approved in January 2002 for a fiscal year that began the prior July. The budget for the 2003 fiscal year was approved in June of 2002, providing some evidence of improvement.

The school is considered to be at **limited development and/or partial implementation.**

Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School Renewal Report

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.3 The board has a process for developing, reviewing and publishing policies and maintains a policy manual.</p>	<p>The board reviews, publishes, and clearly communicates policies annually, and maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p>	<p>The board reviews and publishes policies annually, and maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p>	<p>The board occasionally reviews and publishes policies.</p>	<p>The board rarely or never reviews existing policies or writes new policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-laws • Policies and Procedures • Interviews • Board meeting minute review

The Sisulu Board of Trustees has approved the major policies of the school and those policies are reviewed by legal counsel employed by Victory Schools, Sisulu's education service provider. Based on interviews with the board and a review of board meeting minutes, the board has no formal process through which policies are reviewed on an annual or other periodic basis.

The board and administration at Sisulu have in the past published and distributed a parent handbook. However, at the time of the renewal visit, no parent handbook had been distributed for the 2003-2004 school year. Interviews indicated that the manual was being revised to include the modifications to the school's academic program and to reflect the leadership of the school's new principal.

The school does have a comprehensive Policy and Procedure Manual for Accounting and Finance. The Manual is a copyrighted Victory Schools product. However, there is no evidence in the Board minutes that they have reviewed and approved this manual or that they are aware of its existence. The current manual replaces a "Financial Controls Policies and Procedures" manual that was used prior to the 2002-2003 fiscal year. The Introduction to the newer Manual indicates that changes included in the newer version were made "by memo" and it is not evident that the Board was party to the changes. In addition, the school's by-laws are silent on procedures for establishing and amending policies and procedures in general.

The School is rated as having a **low level or no evidence of development and implementation for this benchmark.**

Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School Renewal Report

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.4 The board has a system for hearing and resolving staff, parent, community, and student views and concerns.</p>	<p>The board actively seeks information from the staff, parent, community and student population. System is consistently and fairly implemented so that all views and concerns are heard and acted upon.</p>	<p>The board actively seeks information from the staff, parent, community and student population and resolves differences of opinion.</p>	<p>The board hears staff, parent, community and student views and concerns, but does not actively solicit their input nor resolve open issues.</p>	<p>The board is unwilling to hear staff, parent, community and student views and concerns and/or take action to resolve concerns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board agendas indicate, at a minimum, time for public comment at each meeting. • By-laws • Policies and Procedures • Interviews • Board meeting minutes

The Sisulu Board of Trustees has processes and policies through which it receives information from staff, parents, community and students. Early in the school's charter, parents were encouraged to directly address the school's board. While the board was clearly responsive in this manner, the board rightly determined that many issues brought directly to the board were more effectively and efficiently handled through direct communication with the principal and parent organization. As such, the board has instituted a policy whereby parent comments and concerns are first directed to the head of the school's Parent Teacher Organization (who serves as a member of the Sisulu Board of Trustees) and are then related to the appropriate staff member or the board in its entirety, depending upon the issue. In addition, other board members are frequent visitors to the school and receive parent concerns, comments, and feedback on an ad hoc basis. The board also conducts annual parent surveys that are used to gauge parent perceptions regarding school performance. In addition, the board survey's Sisulu's teachers and staff and conducts roundtables at which issues important to the progress of the school are discussed.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Sisulu Children's Academy Harlem Public Charter School Renewal Report

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.5 The board complies with the Open Meetings Law.</p>	<p>The board posts meetings appropriately and maintains copies of minutes and other official actions, and has records available according to state statutes. Board can demonstrate attentive, careful compliance with the Open Meetings Law.</p>	<p>The board maintains copies of minutes and other official actions and has records available according to state statutes. Board can demonstrate substantial with the Open Meetings Law.</p>	<p>The board maintains some copies of minutes and other official actions and has some records available according to state statutes. Board can demonstrate with the Open Meetings Law.</p>	<p>The board maintains no copies of minutes and other official actions and has no records available in accordance with state statutes. Board can demonstrate little or no compliance with the Open Meetings Law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-laws • Policies, procedures, and other Institute records • Interviews

The board complies with the Open Meetings Law. The Institute's files and interviews with board members collectively attest to the school's operational level of compliance with the state's Open Meetings Law. In particular, the board maintains a policy for compliance with that law, and board minutes reflect that its dictates have generally been observed. The Institute's records show that most apparent inconsistencies occurred in the early years of the school's operation. One notable problem area from earlier in the charter related to the improper use of voting by proxy, a practice that ceased once brought to the school's attention. Another issue involved a provision in the bylaws allowing for board action without a meeting. Again, this was quickly remedied once brought to the school's attention.

On the basis of this information, the Institute finds that the school has demonstrated a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.6 The board has a comprehensive conflict of interest policy that requires the board to avoid conflicts of interest, and the board has abided by that policy.</p>	<p>The board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy and has abided by it in all instances.</p>	<p>The board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy and has in all but minor instances abided by it.</p>	<p>The board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy but has not generally abided by it OR the board has an insufficient policy by which it has generally abided</p>	<p>The board does not have a conflict of interest policy and/or it has not abided by the policy it does have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-laws • Policies and Procedures • Board disclosure statement • Interviews

Sisulu's board has a comprehensive conflict of interest policy that requires the board to avoid conflicts of interest, and the board has abided by that policy.

The Board adopted a conflict of interest policy, as well as a code of ethics, at the September 2000 Board meeting. Those actions and documents are reflected in the minutes of that meeting.

The school is considered to be **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C1.7 The board conducts an annual evaluation of the school administrator(s).</p>	<p>The board annually conducts a thorough and fair evaluation of the school administrator. The evaluation is based on clearly defined goals and measurements. Both the administration and the board are facile with the evaluation process in place.</p>	<p>The board annually conducts a thorough and fair evaluation of the school administrator. The evaluation is based on clearly defined goals and measurements.</p>	<p>The board occasionally evaluates the school administrator.</p>	<p>The board never evaluates the school administrator.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-laws • Policies and Procedures, evaluation form(s) • Interviews

The Sisulu board, significantly in the last half of the school's charter, has conducted a thorough evaluation of the school's performance as a whole, including that of its principals. In addition to its own analysis of student achievement and the principal's role in increasing it, the school's education service provider, Victory Schools, provides the board of trustees with a principal assessment system that includes the following measures:

- Instructional Leadership
 - Curriculum Implementation
 - Improved student achievement as measured by standardized tests
 - Improved student performance on non standardized assessments (Direct Instruction, Reading, Core Knowledge)
- School Management
 - Student behavior
 - Supervision and evaluation of staff
 - Compliance with school policies and applicable law
 - Student attendance
 - Student withdrawals
- Community Interaction
 - Parent satisfaction survey
 - Community Advisory Committee evaluation of responsiveness

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Rubric 2C2. Administration & Staff

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C2.1 Teachers at the school feel supported by the administration and Board; morale among the teaching staff is high</p>	<p>All teachers indicate that they feel highly supported by the school's administration and Board. Teachers at the school enjoy their work experience, support each other, and recognize the value of their work.</p>	<p>Most teachers indicate that they feel supported by the school's administration and Board. Most teachers at the school enjoy their work experience, support each other, and recognize the value of their work.</p>	<p>Several teachers indicate that they feel supported by administration and Board. Those that feel supported enjoy their work experience, support each other, and recognize the value of their work.</p>	<p>Few teachers indicate that they feel supported by the school's administration and Board. Those that feel supported enjoy their work experience, support each other, and recognize the value of their work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Renewal inspection observations • School visit/inspection reports • Teacher retention rates

Interviews with all of Sisulu's teachers indicate that they appreciate the support and commitment provided by Sisulu's current principal. As the school has a number of new teachers, the principal has increased focused on rigorous classroom instruction, and the school is working at a daunting pace to ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge required to have students meet New York states performance standards, teachers feel supported but challenged at Sisulu. Teachers indicate their commitment, exemplified by extra hours and effort, is recognized and celebrated by the school's principal.

The school is considered to be **fully functioning and at an operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functional and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C2.2 The teaching staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter.</p>	<p>Teachers are certified or otherwise qualified as required under law with few or no exceptions. They demonstrate expertise in their assigned content area and consistently display instructional practices that promote rigor and lead to student academic success.</p>	<p>Teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under the law with some exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with applicable law, the school has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.</p>	<p>A significant number of teachers are not certified or qualified under the law on a consistent basis and remedial measures have not been consistently or swiftly implemented. Teacher content knowledge and instructional practices are improving and/or have varied due to teacher turnover.</p>	<p>All or almost all teachers are not certified or otherwise qualified and little if any remedial measures have been taken. Teachers’ demonstrated content matter knowledge and instructional practices are unacceptable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Renewal inspection observations • School visit/inspection reports

The school reports that of the ten classroom teachers and four specials teachers (French, Title I, special education and music), nine hold appropriate New York State certification. However, the five teachers who did not hold New York State certification at the time of the renewal visit appear to qualify to teach as uncertified teachers under the provisions of the Charter Schools Law. All teacher certification information has been forwarded to the State Education Department for verification.

Classroom observations, review of teacher plans, and interviews indicated that Sisulu’s teaching staff has the necessary foundation skills required to improve the learning and achievement of their students. The principal has identified instructional needs of each staff member and is addressing them through a rigorous professional development program. Teachers relay a strong commitment to ensuring students meet the rigorous performance demanded by state standards and are working to increase both their content knowledge as well as instructional practices. The school has, over the life of its charter, experienced a rate of teacher turnover that has hindered its ability to continuously improve the overall instructional strength of the school.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation**.

Note: The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has ultimate responsibility for determining compliance in this area. See the NYSED compliance visit report that was completed in the school’s third year of the charter.

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C2.3 The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation.</p>	<p>School leadership spends extended time in every teacher's classroom. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel and support from leadership for improvement.</p>	<p>School leadership regularly spends time in every teacher's classroom. Teachers receive some written and verbal feedback, counsel and support from leadership for improvement.</p>	<p>School leadership spends teacher's classroom. Teachers occasionally receive written and verbal feedback, counsel, and support from leadership for improvement.</p>	<p>School leadership rarely or never spends time in teachers' classrooms. Teachers rarely or never receive feedback, counsel, and support from leadership for improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Renewal inspection observations • School visit/inspection reports

The school presented evidence of ongoing teacher evaluation throughout the life of its charter. Sisulu's education service provider, Victory Schools, has a formal assessment process that includes classroom visitations, reviews of lesson plans, and formal feedback from the school's principal. The assessment system includes objective indicators (the progress of students as measured by standardized tests) as well as formal written and informal verbal evaluations by the school's principal. In addition, teacher assessments incorporate ratings from teaching assistants and parents.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Rubric 2C3 Parents & Students

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C3.1 Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by the school leadership's use of generally accepted surveying, analysis, and interpretation tools and procedures.</p>	<p>According to parent/guardian surveys, the school is exceeding its goals in parent/guardian satisfaction.</p>	<p>According to parent/guardian surveys, the school is meeting its goals in parent/guardian satisfaction.</p>	<p>According to parent/guardian surveys, the school is partially meeting its goals in parent/guardian satisfaction.</p>	<p>According to parent/guardian surveys, the school is not meeting its goals in parent/guardian satisfaction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent survey data • Lottery and enrollment information • Choice and persistence levels

Over the life of the charter, Sisulu has presented consistent evidence that a majority of parents are satisfied with the school. In 1999-2000, with a 27% response rate, 75% of Sisulu's parents expressed satisfaction with Sisulu's progress in educating their children with 95% of responders stating they would recommend the school to other parents. 83% of responders agreed that Sisulu was "a lot better" than other local public schools. Data from the 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 school year provide similar responses. It must be noted, however, that in at least two years (99-00 and 02-03) parent survey response rates were low.

The State Education Department noted in its 3rd year report on Sisulu that parents interviewed by the State Education Department staff "expressed a relatively high degree of satisfaction" with the school. The school has been fully enrolled since it opened and has posted a waiting list of students hoping to attend the school each year of its charter. In the school's third year, a significant number of students withdrew, a possible indication of parent satisfaction. The school did not present data to show why parents chose to withdraw their children from the school making a clear determination of the satisfaction of these parents impossible. The school's renewal application presented positive evidence of parent satisfaction, including testimonials from parents that cited improved student achievement, class size, and hands on learning as reasons for satisfaction with the choice of Sisulu for their children's education.

Based on this evidence, the school is considered to at **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Rubric 2C4 Legal Requirements

Benchmark	Exemplary level of Operational level and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible sources of evidence
<p>2C4.1 The school has complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations (§ 2852(2))</p>	<p>School has an exemplary record of compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, maintains highly effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal requirements are met, and is currently in substantial compliance with relevant authorities.</p>	<p>School has a record of substantial compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, maintains effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal requirements are met, and is currently in substantial compliance with relevant authorities.</p>	<p>School has a record of partial compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, maintains inconsistently effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal requirements are met, and is currently in substantial compliance with relevant authorities.</p>	<p>School has a poor record of compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, has ineffective or non-existent systems and controls in place for ensuring that legal requirements are met, and is currently out of compliance with relevant authorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents contained in CSI school files (such as correspondence, written assurances, policies, grievance submissions, etc.) • Any materials submitted by renewal applicant for consideration, attesting to its record of compliance • Interviews with representative staff and board members

The Institute’s files document the school’s record of compliance with applicable law. Documents such as board minutes, site visit reports (by the Institute and the State Education Department), correspondence and written policies collectively attest to the school’s record of substantial compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations. The renewal application speaks of the school’s attempts to meet applicable legal requirements. It notes that “in those cases where the Academy was cited as in need of improvement, or out of compliance, the school moved quickly” to remedy the problem. Institute records and interviews with board and staff members generally support this statement.

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The Institute's records show that such instances have been limited and occurred mainly in the early years of its operation. Problem areas have included the submission of data and reports after established due dates, late submission of teacher certification information and initial delays in submitting facility documentation.

Interviews with school board members indicated a general awareness of the school's legal obligations. Counsel for Victory Schools regularly apprises the Board of legal issues and changing legal requirements. The school's renewal application does not contain any materials attesting to the school's record of compliance other than a general description of the school's efforts to meet its legal obligations.

Based on the Institute's files and interviews with board members and the school director, the school appears to currently be in substantial compliance with relevant legal authorities.

It should be noted that records indicate that the school billed the district for ineligible special education services during the 2002-03 school year and potentially during the two previous school years as well. These practices have been discontinued and corrective steps have been implemented by the school and its management company. The Institute is continuing its inquiry into the scope and nature of the billing discrepancies and may require that additional corrective steps be undertaken.

On the basis of all available information, the Institute finds that the school has demonstrated an **operational level of implementation.**

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>2C4.2 The school board ensures compliance with applicable laws through access to professional legal counsel.</p>	<p>The school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed. The school does not hesitate to seek advice from legal counsel when appropriate.</p>	<p>The school has identified and retained independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>	<p>The school sometimes makes use of legal counsel to review relevant policies, documents, and incidents. Often times the school addresses situations requiring legal counsel on its own.</p>	<p>The school never makes use of legal counsel to review relevant policies, documents, and incidents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents contained in CSI school files (such as correspondence, written assurances, policies, grievance submissions, etc.). • Any materials submitted by renewal applicant for consideration, attesting to its record of compliance. • Interviews with representative board members.

The school board ensures compliance with applicable laws through access to professional legal counsel. The Institute’s files and interviews with board members collectively indicate that the school has an active ongoing relationship with legal counsel for Victory Schools, who reviews relevant policies, documents and incidents and makes recommendations upon request. It has also retained the firm of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson to handle non-for-profit incorporation matters and secured other outside legal assistance as needed. At the time of the renewal visit, the board had not sought independent counsel to review matters where the performance of Victory Schools may be at issue. Subsequent to the renewal visit, the school’s board reports it has retained pro bono counsel that has reviewed its amended management agreement with Victory Schools. Counsel will continue to assist the board in reviewing school compliance and legal issues as they arise.

On the basis of this information, the Institute finds that the school has demonstrated a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation**.

Renewal Question 3 – Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Rubric 3 Fiscal Stability

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>3.1 The school complies with financial reporting requirements as contracted with chartering authority.</p>	<p>The State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department receive all required reports on time and all reports are complete.</p>	<p>The State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department receive all required reports usually on time and, with few exceptions, are complete.</p>	<p>The State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department receive most reports mostly on time, and most are complete.</p>	<p>The State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department receive few required reports. Those they do receive are generally not complete and not submitted on time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Audits for opinion, surplus/deficit, notes to the financial statements and supporting schedules. • Quarterly Financial Reports for cash flows during year, surpluses, deficits, timely reporting.

The school complies with financial reporting requirements as contracted with its chartering authority. This indicates that the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department receive most required reports mostly on time, and most are complete.

The school is considered to be at the **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
3.2 The school adheres to a balanced budget.	The school has created a budget where expenses are consistently less than revenue.	The school has created a budget where expenses are equal to or less than revenue.	The school has created a budget where expenses occasionally exceed revenue.	The school has created a budget where expenses consistently exceed revenue.	Management of the schools ability to monitor and manage operating cash flow.

As charter schools receive no access to the traditional modes of facilities financing available to other public schools, finding appropriate facilities for the enrollment capacity and growth envisioned in the school's original charter application have driven Sisulu's operating deficit. Sisulu's board of trustees and its education service provider, Victory Schools, have sustained the school throughout the term of its current charter through an agreement from Victory Schools that it will provide services to the school on a pro bono basis. Specifically, the school avoided actual cash deficits during its first four years because Victory Schools has forgiven all education service provider fees owed by Sisulu under the board's contract with Victory. However, these expenses are reflected on the School's financial statements through June 30, 2002 and will be included in the statements for the 2003 fiscal year. As such, when this activity is analyzed on an accrual basis, financial records reflect operating deficits in each of the school's first four years.

Beginning in the 2004 fiscal year, the management contract with Victory Schools was amended to state that all management services provided by Victory School would be provided on a pro bono basis until June 2005. As such, they are no longer reflected as an expense in Sisulu's budget, but the school cannot function without the availability of these services. The relationship with Victory Schools is uncertain beyond June 2005. Victory Schools' leadership stated an unwavering commitment to continue to support Sisulu and that the needs of the school would not be abandoned.

A review of the budget forecasts for the renewal period project annual surpluses of approximately 5-6% annually. However, the expense portion of the projection does not reflect any management fees or any staff being hired to perform the work done by an education service provider. The revenue base for the school has never been able to sustain these costs, and budgetary forecasts predict it will not be able to do so in the future under the current facility structure. If 15% of revenues is used as a proxy for this expense (which is what Victory charged for central services in the original agreements) the budgets for the renewal period will shift from having surpluses to having deficits ranging from approximately 9 to 12 percent. The school looks to reduce facilities costs to manage this issue in the future.

Because the school has a nominally balanced budget, but that balanced budget is dependent upon potentially non recurring subsidies of expenses, the school is considered to be at **limited development and/or partial implementation**.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
3.3 Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).	Additional funding is available for discretionary expenditures.	School is not dependent on grants, donations and fundraising to meet its financial obligations.	The school's budget is partially dependent on grants, donations and fundraising to meet its financial obligations.	The school's budget is largely dependent on grants, donations, and fundraising to meet its financial obligations.	Management of the schools ability to monitor and manage operating cash flow.

Please refer to the comments in 3.2 above. The School has had and will continue to have a major operating expense that is not covered by operating revenues. Since the other expense projections are very reasonable (making cuts highly undesirable from an education perspective), the school will need to increase revenues or secure ongoing donations to maintain balanced budgets.

Facility related considerations affect the analysis of Sisulu's fiscal stability with enrollment holding at 200 students each year. (The school looks to enroll a total of 300 students over the term of a future charter. This enrollment level, however, is dependent upon securing a facility that will both meet budgetary considerations and has the capacity to hold 300 students appropriately.)

An analysis of the fixed and variable costs of the school indicates that an enrollment of 200 students will not cause additional detriment. Beginning in the 2005 fiscal year, Sisulu plans to contain its entire operation within its primary facility and discontinue use of a second site, the Police Action League. In addition, the school's plan calls for a reduction in rent at its primary facility. Sisulu's board of trustees reports that the rent agreed to for the term of the school's first charter was entered into under a time constraint to get the school up and running upon the signing of its original charter. These constraints and the prevailing economy at the time the school opened forced the board into agreeing to rental costs that were beyond typical market value for the space. The board maintains that the space in its primary facility is somewhat unique and currently has a limited market value making the owner willing to re-negotiate the lease rather than risk losing a secure, long-term tenant. The space totals 10,000 square feet and the current annual rent is approximately \$331,000. The financial plan for the renewal period calls for a 20% reduction in rent, with 3% annual increases.

The school is considered to be **limited in development and/or partial implementation**.

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Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>3.4 The school follows generally accepted accounting practices.</p>	<p>During an audit the school can verify every transaction. The audit is consistently positive and indicates that the school follows generally accepted accounting practices.</p>	<p>During an audit the school can verify every transaction. The audit indicates that the school follows generally accepted accounting practices.</p>	<p>The audit indicates that the school is only partially following generally accepted accounting practices.</p>	<p>The school does not follow generally accepted accounting practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Letters from external auditor to school management that identifies deficiencies found while conducting the annual audits, if applicable, determine if issues been resolved in a timely manner.</i> • <i>Reports of deficiencies in financial operations and/or internal controls and determine if issues have been satisfactorily resolved in a timely manner.</i>

The school has three years of audited financial statements for the fiscal years 2000, 2001 and 2002. The auditor's opinion for all three years indicated that the school prepared its financial statements in conformance with generally accepted accounting principles.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**

Sisulu Children’s Academy Harlem Public Charter School Renewal Report

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
3.5 The school has successful annual financial audits.	Management letter reflects no need for financial procedure changes.	Management letter reflects need for few financial procedure changes.	Management letter indicates numerous financial procedure concerns.	Management letter indicates significant financial problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit Opinion

The three audits cited above indicate that there were no material findings by the auditor and no management letters were included.

The school is considered to be at an **exemplary level of development and implementation.**

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<p>3.6 The school implements the auditor's recommendations.</p>	<p>School implements all of the auditor's recommendations. Procedures are tracked and evaluated to ensure compliance with audit recommendations.</p>	<p>School implements all of the auditor's recommendations.</p>	<p>School implements some of auditor's recommendations.</p>	<p>School does not implement auditor's recommendations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Opinion • Quarterly Financial Reports • Annual Budgets and Cash Flow

As the school's auditor has not submitted recommendations this rubric is not applicable.

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<p>3.7 The school has operated pursuant to a long range financial plan.</p>	<p>Long range financial plan has been in place and an analysis of its feasibility was conducted at the time of its implementation. Annual budget revisions are made with reference to and consistent with this plan and/or the plan is revised to take account of changed fiscal realities.</p>	<p>Long range financial plan was implemented and determined to be feasible. The school has considered the plan in its budgeting process.</p>	<p>Long range financial plan is in place, but its feasibility or practicality is questionable and/or it has not been followed or revised.</p>	<p>No long range financial plan exists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Opinion • Quarterly Financial Reports • Annual Budgets and Cash Flow • Board minutes

Due to the school's continued challenge with locating a facility large enough to serve the number of students envisioned in original charter, the financial plan submitted in Sisulu's original charter application did not come to fruition. As Sisulu was unable to locate a facility suitable for the 647 students envisioned at the time the school was first chartered, Sisulu's board of trustees made appropriate adjustments to its original long range financial plan. These adjustments reduced the school's enrollment and therefore reduced anticipated revenue.

Originally approved for 647 students, Sisulu opened with 247 students in its first year and climbed to a high of 338 students in its second year. The 300 students currently enrolled at Sisulu are housed in two sites, generating associated facilities costs. To address the difficulties of providing an educational program that is coherent and vertically aligned yet housed in facilities that are blocks apart, the Sisulu board of trustees has proposed that the school scale back enrollment to 200 children. The school's primary location can adequately house 200 students and will allow the school's current principal consistent opportunities to raise the level of academic success at the school. The school has provided a financial plan for the term of a possible future charter that projects a steady enrollment of 200 students and diminished facility costs.

The school is considered to be in **limited development and/or partial implementation**.

Benchmark	Exemplary level of development and implementation	Fully functioning and operational level of implementation	Limited development and/or partial implementation	Low level or no evidence of development and implementation	Possible Sources of Evidence
<p>3.8 The school accurately tracks grant funds.</p>	<p>All grant expenditures are tied to back-up and receipts are readily available. Any grant expenditure revisions are clearly documented.</p>	<p>Accurate detail is available for all grant expenditures. Any grant expenditure revisions are clearly documented.</p>	<p>Receipts do not match financial information.</p>	<p>The school does not track grant funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Opinion • Quarterly Financial Reports • Annual Budgets and Cash Flow

All evidence indicates that grant funds are accurately tracked by the School's accounting system.

The school is considered to be at a **fully functioning and operational level of implementation.**