



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Albany Community Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2009-2010

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding the current visit to the school, summarizing areas of strength and areas for growth. The second section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. The third, entitled School Evaluation Visit, presents the analysis of evidence collected during the current evaluation visit. A summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations is also provided as background and context for the current evaluation.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit to the Albany Community Charter School (“Albany Community”), the school appears to be making substantial progress towards achieving its mission and meeting the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks considered during this evaluation. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

Academic Success

Areas of Strength:

- Albany Community regularly administers assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum and state standards. Teachers and school leaders effectively use results to modify instruction and identify students for remediation.
- The school has adequate instructional materials aligned to its curriculum framework.
- Teachers implement purposeful lessons and students were generally engaged by instruction.
- Strong instructional leadership has emerged at the school. Instructional leaders provide teachers with sustained and systematic support.
- The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.
- The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.

Areas for Growth:

- The school has made some progress in developing curriculum maps for English language arts and mathematics based on commercial programs, but has not yet developed maps for science and social studies.
- The rigor of instruction varied across observed classrooms.
- The school’s professional development program is well resourced, but not adequately differentiated to meet the needs of all teachers.

Organizational Capacity

Areas of Strength:

- The school has faithfully followed its mission and key design elements.
- The organizational structure support distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- The school has hired and retained quality staff and maintained sufficient enrollment.
- The board has adequate skills, structures and procedures with which to govern the school and holds school leaders and itself accountable for student achievement.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	July 15, 2005
Date Initial Charter Approved by Operation of Law	December 11, 2005
School Opening Date	September 2006

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2006-07, 2007-08	42 South Dove St., Albany, NY 12202	All	Albany City School District
2007-08 -Present	65 Krank St., Albany, NY 12202	All	Albany City School District

Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current	Brighter Choice Foundation	Non-profit	2006-07 - Present

Current Mission Statement

The mission of the Albany Community Charter School is to prepare students to meet and exceed New York State standards in the core subjects with a primary focus on literacy, which forms the bedrock of all learning.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The use of teaching maps for every grade and subject.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The use of the blackboard configuration to maximize time on task and student learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlighting the academic achievements of individual students through a wall of fame weekly posting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using a database to enter and maintain student academic results so that individual, aggregate, and disaggregated and used to improve student learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data informed decision making to evaluate teacher performance, develop individual student action plans, and make curricular modifications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two instructors per class following a lead/assist model.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An extended school day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly instructional allotments including 10 hours of English language arts, 6.25 hours of mathematics, three hours of science, and three hours of social studies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional development of teachers including co-grading of papers to ensure grading reliability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal education goals for each student.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2006-07	104	104	K-1	K-1	200
2007-08	182	167	K-2	K-2	200
2008-09	266	231	K-3	K-3	191
2009-10	286	304	K-4	K-4	192

Student Demographics

	2008-09 ²		2009-10	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD of Albany Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment ³	Percent of CSD of Albany Enrollment ⁴
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0%	0%	1%
Black or African American	78%	62%	87%	61%
Hispanic	14%	11%	8%	12%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	5%	0%	6%
White	3%	20%	5%	21%
Multiracial	4%	1%	0%	0%
Students with Disabilities ⁵	4%	N/A	4%	N/A
Limited English Proficient	2%	5%	2%	6%
Eligible for Free Lunch	77%	59%	88%	50%
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	15%	10%	7%	8%

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

² Source: 2008-09 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

³ Source: 2009-10 demographic and Limited English Proficient percentages based on BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. Percent Eligible for Free Lunch is based on schools' BEDS data as reported by SED; percent Eligible for Reduced Price Lunch provided by the school.

⁴ Aggregated district data not yet available for 2009-10.

⁵ New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is school-reported from charter renewal applications. District data from NYSED Special Education School District Data Profile.

Current Board of Trustees⁶

Board Member Name	Position/Committees
Michael J. Strianese	President
Mason Tolman	Treasurer
Deb Docherty	Secretary
Tom Minnick	Vice-President
Laurel Colasurdo	Trustee
Juanita Nabors	Trustee
Paul Thallner	Trustee
Sharon Winston	Trustee / Parent Advisory Board Representative
Bramble Buran	Trustee
Molly Slingerland	Trustee

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2006-07 through 2009-10	S. Neal Currie, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2006-07	First year	Institute	February 26, 2007
2007-08	Second year	Institute	February 5, 2008
2008-09	Third year	External	March 30-31, 2009
2009-10	Fourth year	Institute	February 9, 2010

⁶ Source: School renewal application and Institute board information.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Background

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

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

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

Summary of Previous Evaluation Visit

An independent evaluation of Albany Community was conducted on behalf of the Institute by RMC, Inc. on March 30-31, 2009. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. As a result of the evaluation visit, a report was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit; these conclusions are briefly summarized below.

The inspection team concluded that the school had made progress in developing a comprehensive, systematic assessment program and in supporting teachers to analyze and use the results to inform their instruction. However, not all data had been routinely collected and teachers did not have all data immediately available. The school had developed a foundation for a defined curriculum in English language arts and mathematics, which was in the process of being refined. The school relied heavily on the textbook programs in these subjects as the basis for the school's curriculum. Work on developing curriculum maps for social studies and science had not begun.

The inspection team observed gaps in the consistency of high quality instruction across classes within and across grades. Most teachers demonstrated subject area competency, relying primarily on the content of the textbook program manual as the basis for their lessons. Most lesson plans were not usually fully developed. Some observed lessons were fast paced and engaging; in other classes the

pace was not as brisk and strategies to involve students were not as well-employed. In addition, teachers had not consistently used questioning strategies that promoted development of higher-order thinking. Most classes had a cooperating teacher or a teaching assistant assigned. Staff understood each others' roles and responsibilities. Inspectors also noted a paucity of appropriate learning materials and resources.

The principal and the assistant principal formed the basis for a strong instructional leadership team. Though direct support had been provided to teachers in each grade, a comprehensive and systematic approach to teacher support was not in place throughout all grades. The school allotted time for professional development throughout the year, however, except for training on developing routines and the behavior system, the inspection team found that professional development sessions were episodic in nature and not based on the assessed needs of staff or on student achievement data.

The school environment was safe and orderly. Behavioral expectations were high for all students. There had been much training and administrative support given to developing a behavior system that was consistent in all classrooms. The program for at-risk students, including special education students and English language learners, was well developed. There was a system for identifying students at risk of failure and for monitoring their progress. A Response to Intervention (RTI) model was used to create a tiered approach to supporting students with special needs.

Albany Community had been largely faithful to its mission and had a sound and effective organizational structure. The board of trustees demonstrated the ability to provide the required oversight and guidance to the school.

Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)

The school has an emerging system to gather and use assessment data. Albany Community regularly administers assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state standards. The DIAL is administered to all registered kindergarten students as a diagnostic assessment, and the DIBELS and a mathematics assessment from Success For All are administered three times per year to measure progress in the lower grades. Teachers also use regular quizzes and tests associated with commercial curriculum programs to assess student learning, and they evaluate student work using grade level rubrics. Teachers also reported the use of formative assessments such as exit tickets and observation checklists to monitor student understanding. The school continues to use interim assessments and mock state exams and also administers the Terra Nova twice per year.

The school collects assessment data and analyzes it to a limited degree. Teachers were trained in the use of Scantron; at the time of the visit this system was primarily being used for interim assessments but the principal reported that teachers were gradually using the tool for weekly classroom assessments. This practice was corroborated by some teachers who described the input of assessment data into a student data management system. Administrators and grade level teams meet regularly to discuss standardized test results. However, a systematic approach to analyzing other assessment results was in the nascent stage. Some teachers individually use spreadsheets to collect assessment data. Others grade assessments by hand and informally review the results, describing their analysis as, "residing in their head." While grade teams discuss and use common rubrics, teachers did not report looking at student work together to norm the results of their grading efforts.

Teachers and school leaders effectively use results to modify instruction and to identify students for remediation. Teachers use assessment results to identify topics for re-teaching to whole classes or to targeted groups, form leveled reading groups, and inform instructional methods. Teachers indicated that, “assessment results are used to place students in tutoring, math AIS, small groups, homework club and discussed with the reading specialist and at IST meetings.” Mock state test results are used to identify students for tutoring and also to adjust curriculum sequences. Some teachers were unaware of the reason for, and the use of, the Terra Nova assessment. School leaders have used data to inform decisions about curriculum, the use of specialist teachers and intervention programs.

The school generally follows clear policies and procedures for the use of student performance data. Parents are informed about their students’ progress and achievement, both through informal communication with teachers and formal progress reports and report cards based primarily on assessment results or rubrics. The school leader indicated he does “not believe in social promotion” and uses grades, attendance and performance data to make retention decisions. Parents are notified mid-year if promotion is in doubt. Interviewed teachers, however, were not clear about the criteria for promotion decisions.

Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)

The school has a defined curriculum based on commercial programs that it has used to prepare students to meet state standards. The school has made some progress in developing curriculum maps for English language arts and mathematics based on commercial programs, but has not yet developed maps for science and social studies. School leaders indicated the maps generally follow the sequence of their commercial programs, such as Harcourt literacy. Many teachers assumed the commercial programs are aligned to state standards because standards are referenced in lessons.

Teachers generally know what to teach and when to teach it, though the use of curriculum maps to guide instructional planning was inconsistent. Some teachers indicated that they only use the maps for pacing. Interviewed teachers often referred to commercial programs as their curriculum; some teachers said they follow the commercial programs as their scope and sequence while others pointed to the curriculum maps.

The school has an evolving process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum. Assessment results are used to inform curriculum review during the summer and grade level meetings during the year, but it was not clear that state standards drove the process so much as the commercial programs did. Teachers did report that curriculum maps had been “re-arranged” during the summer to address identified gaps and the principal described a focus on vertical alignment of the Harcourt literacy programs. Curriculum maps were referred to as “living documents” discussed at grade team meetings; the school intends to further refine them in the coming summer and complete maps for social studies and science as well.

Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)

Adequate instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school. Teachers implement purposeful lessons, though learning objectives were often not clear in observed classes. Many teachers stated or posted their objectives for the lesson, though the lesson aim at times was a general topic or task such as “read a story” rather than a measurable objective. In most cases lessons were deliberate and designed to achieve the objective.

Students were generally engaged by instruction, but its rigor varied across observed classrooms. In most classes students were observed actively participating in learning activities. The co-teaching model most often observed was lead and assist, though in some cases the assistant was more focused on behavior than instruction. In some classes teachers asked students to explain their answers or assigned tasks that required students to analyze or make connections. In other classes questioning focused primarily on recall or did not provide sufficient time for students to think and respond with a deeper answer. Teachers often answered their own questions or asked leading questions that limited the development of higher order thinking or problem-solving skills. In a mathematics lesson the teacher did most of the work, leaving only computation for students to do on their own.

The school has devoted significant resources to differentiate instruction, though limited evidence was observed during the visit. Teachers and administrators both reported increased personnel to support differentiation, and teachers described specific strategies used both within their classrooms and at other times during the school day. The majority of examples cited involved small group instruction, either with a cooperating teacher or a specialist. Nevertheless, minimal differentiation was evident during the visit. Whole class instruction was the predominant delivery method observed and materials and tasks were similar for all students, even during small group instruction. One teacher said she only does guided reading once in a while. While schedules indicated time for centers, one teacher reported she does not use it for that purpose. In some classes more advanced or quicker students sat idle while waiting for the teachers to finishing working with other students.

Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)

Strong instructional leadership has emerged at the school. School leaders instill generally high expectations for teacher performance and student achievement. Documents reviewed during the visit indicated that goals have been set for increasing the percentage of students performing at the highest level on the state test as well as the average performance on nationally-normed standardized tests. Teachers spoke of “pushing students beyond just proficiency.” Significant time was spent by staff during the summer reviewing data and accomplishments from the previous year, and establishing priorities and focus areas, as well as generating strategies for the coming year. The principal has communicated clear priorities, including aligning the remedial program with classroom instruction, enhancing the efficiency of grade teams, and expanding the use of data. School leaders were able to speak about individual teachers’ in terms both inputs such as classroom management and organizational skills and also their contributions to measurable student performance outcomes.

Instructional leaders provide teachers with sustained and systematic support. In addition to the principal, an assistant principal and specialists in mathematics and reading provide teachers with ongoing guidance and support. The specialists provide professional development activities, serve as a resource for teachers, and coordinate academic events such as literacy and mathematics nights. The assistant principal oversees curriculum and assessment; for example, she monitors implementation of the curriculum, provides feedback on lesson plans, and meets with grade level teams to review assessment data. The principal and assistant principal observe instruction regularly and have adopted a “walk-through” form to structure short observations. The principal reported that they schedule periodic meetings with teachers to go over the forms and look at patterns over time. Teachers corroborated the regular presence of instructional leaders in their classrooms and ongoing support through feedback, meetings and professional development.

Instructional leaders conduct regular evaluations and, based on limited evidence, identify teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. The principal reported that they conduct unannounced full-period

observations about two times per semester and a formal observation in May which inform a summative evaluation at the end of the year. Teachers believe the evaluation system is fair, clearly defined, linked to what they are asked to do, and “an important part of the support” they receive.

Teachers are held accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. They are asked to set goals, which are used to inform regular observation and feedback. The evaluation system also sets explicit criteria for teacher performance and is informed by student outcomes. If system goals/criteria are not met after efforts to help them improve, teachers are not asked to return.

At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)

The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically. The school uses clear procedures for identifying at-risk students: a Response to Intervention model with tiered interventions. An instructional support team coordinates discussions about students of concern, generates strategies and decides when more intensive interventions or evaluation are needed. Teachers were familiar with the process and described regular meetings to discuss student performance data in relation to at-risk students. Staff also noted the use of home language surveys to identify English language learners.

The school provides sufficient resources and support to meet the needs of at-risk students. A special education coordinator also does some teaching in addition to administering the special education programs. The school has a resource room for supplemental services required by Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The use of the co-teaching model allows teachers to target support to individual or small groups of students. Special education and ESL teachers and recently added literacy and mathematics specialists provide targeted assistance for students through both pull-out and classroom instruction. The school has also scheduled “tier time” during which classroom teachers work on skill development with small groups. Albany Community also provides homework club in the morning, after school tutoring and summer school for struggling students.

The school adequately monitors the progress and success of at-risk students. As noted in the assessment section, the school administers diagnostic, formative and summative assessments throughout the year, and uses the results to monitor students and programs. General education teachers were familiar with their students’ Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and special education staff monitors progress in meeting them.

Teachers are provided with sufficient support to help them meet the needs of at-risk students. Teachers noted training by content specialists and the special education coordinator to help them meet the needs of their students. They also indicated frequent communication between classroom teachers and support staff regarding assessment results, lesson plans and instructional strategies.

Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)

The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. Albany Community is extremely safe and orderly. During the visit students were respectful and well-behaved with staff monitoring public spaces such as hallways closely. Students transitioned quickly and quietly. Within classrooms teachers have effective management and routines that promote learning. Most students had internalized school-wide expectations and minor misbehavior was consistently redirected. Summer training emphasized establishment of routines and culture to support learning and maximize the use

of time. Teachers role-played from the perspective of students, which they found useful and illuminating.

The school has a clear discipline system in place that is consistently applied. A behavior card system was evident and rules were posted in classrooms. Students appeared to know the system and there were few negative reactions to observed consequences for minor infractions.

Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)

The school's professional development program is well resourced but not yet developed into a cohesive program. Documents reviewed during the visit indicated a number of priorities for professional development, including alignment of remediation and intervention services with classroom instruction, improvement in the use of data, increased productivity and functionality of grade teams, enhanced preparation for Terra Nova exams, reduction of student retention, expansion of enrichment opportunities, and improvement of students' social skills. The school's professional development plan did not identify specific needs or contain specific goals or outcomes.

Professional development begins with two weeks in the summer with some training specifically for new teachers, followed by monthly half-days during the school year. Teachers noted some continuity through the use of the Taxonomy of Effective Teaching, but did not report a cohesive professional development program or alignment to the school's priorities.

Professional development is not adequately differentiated to meet the needs of all teachers. Teachers reported on a variety of topics covered by school trainings and opportunities to attend off-site professional development. This year the school has instituted more formal grade team meetings led by a grade team leader, where grade specific curriculum and instruction are discussed. Finally, regular observation and feedback do provide some measure of differentiated support. Nevertheless, the needs of individual teachers were not clearly identified, and some veteran teachers believed that professional development was often repetitive and thus more appropriate for novice teachers.

Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)

The school has faithfully followed its mission and key design elements. Stakeholders consistently spoke about raising student achievement as the primary mission of the school. The school has set ambitious goals beyond those in its Accountability Plan, including increasing the percentage of students at the highest level on the state test and increasing the average student performance on the Terra Nova exam. Albany Community has implemented most of its key design elements, though not all teachers were familiar with the concept of developing personal education goals for each student.

Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)

Based on limited evidence, families are satisfied with the school. The school's family survey had a very low response rate, making it impossible to draw any conclusions from the results. The school has a parent advisory board and parent coordinator; documents indicated 10-20 parents attend the PAB's monthly meetings. The school board's meeting minutes also indicate parents have raised issues with the board, including transportation and the availability of books in the library and classrooms. The school has also provided resources for parents, such as assistance with completing taxes online.

Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)

The organizational structure support distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The principal serves as the school leader; the assistant principal is primarily focused on curriculum, instruction and assessment. The school has added content specialist positions; teachers were clear about the roles of administrators and knew who go to for what. The school is competently managed and appeared to be a well-run organization.

Teachers believed that they had sufficient resources. Board minutes indicate additional instructional materials were purchased, addressing a parental concern and noted in a previous school evaluation report. The school's facility meets its needs and reportedly has had a positive impact on its standing in the community.

The school has hired and retained quality staff. The principal described a rigorous hiring process involving phone and in-person interviews and demonstration lessons, as well as input from teachers and parents. He has been generally satisfied with the caliber of teachers found through the process. New teachers were hired this year for a new grade and to replace teachers who had left or been let go. One teacher from the previous year was let go due to poor classroom management and inadequate improvement, after administrators reportedly had worked with the teacher over the course of year without significant progress. Three other teachers from the previous year left the school; the principal indicated most departed because they were moving out of the area. The school added the 4th grade this year and hired two new teachers and two new cooperating teachers specifically for that grade. Albany Community has used its cooperating teacher positions to identify promising staff and has elevated some into the role of lead teacher.

The school maintains sufficient enrollment. The school enrolls students in all grades though teachers reported this has presented a challenge due to the strong school culture.

Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)

The board has adequate skills, structures and procedures with which to govern the school. Board members have expertise in education, finance, law and marketing, and the board includes a parent representative. The board operates with a committee structure, including finance and HR, and plans an ad hoc committee to prepare for renewal.

The Albany Community board is focused on student achievement. It receives regular updates on student performance, including interim assessment data. The board also reviews data on student enrollment and attendance, finance and school culture and discipline. The board has been responsive to issues raised in past evaluation reports and by parents, citing the hiring of an ESL teacher and increased resources for books. Board minutes indicate that the board is considering long-term issues; it has discussed options for developing a strategic plan and funding for the potential purchase of the building.

The board holds school leaders and itself accountable for student achievement. Board minutes indicate work on a performance appraisal for the principal, though interviewed board members said they did not yet have a good tool in place. Nevertheless, the board has explicit metrics and uses them to hold the school leader accountable. In terms of board development, the board chair is participating in conferences with other board chairs to discuss issues such as principal compensation. The board has also actively recruited new members with expertise in law and education.

Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at Albany Community on February 9, 2010. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

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

Maya Lagana is an Analyst for School Evaluation for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. She is responsible for scheduling ongoing school evaluation visits, communicating with school team members and administrative staff regarding site visit logistics and requirements, developing and disseminating RFP documents, and coordinating the recruitment and work of consultants. Ms. Lagana worked for New Visions for Public Schools, Achievement First and Boston Collegiate Charter School while in graduate school. Previously, Ms. Lagana was an Assessment Specialist at the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence in Washington D.C., where she helped to develop teacher certification exams and analyzed item level statistics and demographics information. In addition to her extensive background as an analyst, Ms. Lagana also has experience as a third grade classroom teacher at P.S. 195 through the New York City Teaching Fellows Program. Ms. Lagana received her Master of Public Administration degree in Policy Analysis from New York University's Wagner School for Public Service, her Masters of Education degree from Mercy College and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Carleton College.

Jason Sarsfield is a Senior Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York, responsible for reviewing school applications, analyzing data to identify critical issues for renewal visit teams, monitoring the development of all renewal recommendation reports and supporting the development, refinement, and revision of internal policies and practices of the Institute's renewal process. Mr. Sarsfield returns to the Institute from the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning in the Bronx, NY, where he supervised the administration of standardized assessments, conducted analysis of student achievement data for purposes of program evaluation, and oversaw the development and submission of reports to state, federal and local agencies. Prior to his service at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning, he served as a Senior Analyst at the SUNY Charter Schools Institute, where he provided leadership for annual and informal school evaluation visits. Before moving to New York to work for the Institute, Mr. Sarsfield was a contract analyst for the Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University, where he evaluated the academic performance of authorized charter schools and provided technical assistance for school improvement initiatives and the analysis of student achievement data. Mr. Sarsfield also served as a teacher and

coach for Bad Axe Public Schools in Michigan and was a teacher at a residential high school in rural Alaska. Mr. Sarsfield received his Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan University and is a candidate for a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.

External Consultants

Constance M. Moss, Ph.D. served as the Associate Superintendent for Shared Accountability/Chief Information Officer with the Buffalo Public Schools. She previously served in the positions of Assistant Superintendent of Standards, Research and Assessment, School District Administrator for Assessment, as well as a principal in both Buffalo and Niagara Falls school systems. Dr. Moss was appointed by Commissioner Mills to serve on the New York State Assessment and Safety Net Panels. Prior to retirement she was a member of the New York State Grades 3 – 8 Assessment Implementation Committee. She is a credentialed curriculum auditor and has participated in national curriculum/accreditation visitations. Dr. Moss recently served as an independent contractor for College Summit. She currently provides support to charter schools.

Joe Nicolella retired after more than thirty years in the field of education at Shenedehowa Central School. At the time of his retirement, Mr. Nicolella was the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, and as such his responsibilities included developing and maintaining all staff rosters and procedures for a district of over 1700 employees; providing leadership and supervision of the district professional development program; recruiting, selecting and hiring staff; coordinating the development of the district teacher assessment and evaluation approach; and conducting disciplinary and other hearings, as well as contract negotiations. Prior to becoming Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Nicolella served as principal and lead principal at the middle school level, as director of student services, as assistant principal and principal at the junior high level, and as a teacher of science at the middle and high school levels for over ten years. Since retirement from public education, Mr. Nicolella has served in the capacity of a supervisor of administrative interns and student teachers at the College of St. Rose, as an interim coordinator of special education on three occasions, and as acting lead principal for the three Shenedehowa middle schools. For nearly six years, he has served with the Charter Schools Institute and the SUNY Research Foundation as the primary consultant responsible for the review and critique curriculum documents submitted to the Institute as a part of the initial charter school application process, charter renewal, or change in academic program. He has also served in several interim positions related to program and school evaluation and participated as a member of numerous school review and school renewal teams. Mr. Nicolella has earned a Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Education. He also holds a Master of Science in Advanced Classroom Teaching and a Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction. Mr. Nicolella has also completed all coursework for the doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. All of his professional training was completed at the University at Albany.

APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.

Visit the Institute's website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc> to see the complete listing of Benchmarks.

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

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

	<p>materials) currently in use in relation to the school’s curriculum framework, identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade; teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans; teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school’s curriculum; the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and the curriculum supports the school’s stated mission.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach; instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators; instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school’s student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments; all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time; learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement; the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement); the school’s instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness; the school’s instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms; the school’s leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas; the school’s instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional

	<p>development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school's leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and the school's leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school's academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs; all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program; the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students; the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures; all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students' Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals; the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident; low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
<p><u>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</u></p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional programs; annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests; professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school's Accountability Plan goals; teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities; the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers' varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities; the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.
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	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
State University Renewal Benchmark 2A Mission & Key Design Elements	The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter. Elements that are generally present include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stakeholders are aware of the mission; the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2B Parents & Students	Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school. Elements that are generally present include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school; the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school; a large number of parents seek entrance to the school; parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2C Organizational Capacity	The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program. Elements that are generally present include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations; staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school's mission;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision; the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals; the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined; the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability; the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted; the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2D Board Oversight	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school; the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight; the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders; the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity; the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance; where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2E Governance	<p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to

	<p>achieve those priorities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter; • the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner; • the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints; • the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; • the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and • the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.
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