

Charter Schools Institute  

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State University of New York

Harlem Village Academy  
Charter School  
Second Year Report

2004-2005

February 24, 2006

## **READER'S GUIDE**

### ***Background***

Authorized by the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998, charter schools are public schools that operate independently of local school districts and are created by civic leaders, community groups, educators and parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities and improving student achievement, particularly for children at-risk of academic failure.

The New York Charter Schools Act empowers the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education to authorize new public charter schools (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor) and thereafter to renew charters of successful schools. Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist in the review and approval of applications to establish charter schools, oversight of chartered schools, and renewal of charters.

As are district-organized public schools, charter schools are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees that, as all school boards, is subject to New York State's Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools authorized by the State University Trustees are also subject to oversight and monitoring by the Institute. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents.

In exchange for freedom from many State rules and regulations, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its "Accountability Plan" or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed, in which case it would close. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools that school districts administer.

### ***The Oversight Process***

As noted above, the State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan and other methods.

In addition to monitoring compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies

that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them, including the strength of their educational programs and organizational structures.

By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals. The first goal is to facilitate improvement. By providing substantive information about the school's strengths and weaknesses to the school's board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the school can potentially take corrective actions. In turn, the school may thereby increase the chances that it will be able to fulfill the promises it made in its charter, including meeting those measures of student achievement set forth in its Accountability Plan. The second goal is to disseminate information beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a data base of information on the school over time. This permits the Institute to better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school—and the likelihood for continued success or failure (as the case may be) based on past patterns when the school comes to renewal, typically in the fifth year of its charter.

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. As the result of the periodic visits and inspections, by the end of the charter period, both the Institute and school will have a mutual sense of the school's strengths and weaknesses as viewed over time, especially as viewed through the prism of charter renewal.

In evaluating schools, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit. How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, the Institute utilizes a series of qualitative indicators to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), these benchmark indicators are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret (for instance, it would be difficult to tease out in the first year the value-added that the school has contributed to a student's success on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade State assessments). The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by

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<sup>1</sup> In the school's first year, the Institute visits the school in the spring and uses many, though not all, of the benchmarks it utilizes during its second year visit as well. The first year visit results in a letter to the school's board of trustees summarizing the Institute's findings. In a charter school's third year, the Institute retains an outside group to provide a more comprehensive review of the school's educational program, outcomes, and various indicators related to organizational effectiveness. This visit results in a formal report to the school's board of trustees that is similar, though not identical, to the second year report.

using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on “how” the school is doing but also “why” it is succeeding or failing.<sup>2</sup>

Over time of course, and particularly at the school’s initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators, student test scores, take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools are responsible for results (outcome measures).<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Second Year Report***

The Second Year Report is the product of the Institute’s visit in the spring of a school’s second year of operation. It contains this reader’s guide, a brief description of the school, a summary of the Institute’s findings from its visit to the school in its first year of operation, a summary of the Institute’s findings and observations from the second-year visit, the evidence gathered under the benchmarks that the Institute utilizes in the second-year visit (from which the summary is drawn) and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the visitors and the date of the visit.

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two to four member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute’s evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors on a second year visit seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment); the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as Board operations and student order and discipline; and the fiscal soundness of the school. Although issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), compliance is not the ultimate purpose of the visit.

The second year visit includes a meeting with the Principal/Director, classroom visitations, and interviews of staff, students and Board members, in addition to reviewing student work. Data from the second year visit, and any previous visits, is used to develop the curriculum and instruction component of this report.

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;

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<sup>2</sup> More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of this highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

<sup>3</sup> Where a school comes to renewal with an ambiguous data set of outcome assessments (because of limited data, inconsistent data—some strong, some weak—or both), the Institute continues to place emphasis on the qualitative indicators as proxy indicators of future success. Thus, where the Institute finds that qualitative indicators are strong, it may still recommend, despite ambiguous evidence of student achievement on assessment results, that the school be renewed (though not for a full term) because the qualitative indicators suggest that with more time the school will compile a strong data set of student assessment outcomes.

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

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

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, the Second Year Report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance that the school is “on track” to be renewed or is not. It does, however, in the “Summary” section, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement.

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

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report (or at the very least the entire summary) and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

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

While this level of what can reasonably be termed “brutal honesty” is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is

held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

## **SCHOOL DESCRIPTION**

Harlem Village Academy Charter School (“Harlem Village”) was approved by the State University Board of Trustees on September 13, 2002. It is located at 413 East 120<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. The school states that its current mission is “to prepare our students to graduate from college and to contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and nation.” The school’s charter presents the mission as follows:

“As part of the Village Academies Network, we fulfill this mission by:

- Teaching our students to be ‘academic athletes’: with a passion for learning and the discipline of hard work;
- Creating our school as a ‘village’: a small, respectful learning community; and,
- Investing in our teachers: building a results-driven organization where excellent educators thrive.”

### ***Background***

Following a planning year, the Harlem Village Academy Charter School opened in September of 2003. The Executive Summary to the school’s charter explains that the “village” in the school’s name refers to “a small, respectful learning environment where every adult knows every student, teachers provide personalized attention, and students feel a sense of connection.”

The school is partnered with the Village Academies Network (“VAN”). In its review of the charter, State Education Department staff asserted VAN was acting as an educational management organization (“EMO”) because it was to provide a range of free services, i.e. professional development, academic design and curriculum, assessment, etc., and should be characterized as such. The lead applicant rejected this assertion, noting VAN has no role in the governance of the school, which is “designed to function in an educationally sound manner, independent of VAN services.”

The school is located at the Harlem Council for Community Improvement (“EHCCI”), which also houses VAN, a nursery school, and a medical clinic. The school has secured a larger, permanent facility into which it will move for the 2006-07 school year.

In March 2004, the Institute notified the school that its enrollment of 76 was not within 15 percent of the 104 projected in its charter. Principal Deborah Kenny explained facility constraints were the issue, and that the school would accommodate its full enrollment for the 2005-06 school year. Subsequently, the school sought and was approved an amendment permitting an enrollment of 76 for 2003-04 and 125 for 2004-05. It sought and received approval to reduce enrollment for 2005-06 from 312 to 151.

In November 2002, after issuance of the charter, the school requested an amendment, permitting it to add a fifth grade. The school explained that, developmentally, students in fifth grade acclimate to a more structured environment more easily than older students, and most schools in CSDs 4 and 5 have elementary schools running Kindergarten through sixth grades. Under the

approved grade structure students would face the choice of attending Harlem Village and missing the last year of their current school, or waiting another year before enrolling.

Harlem Village Academy Charter School proposes a rigorous academic community in which students take great satisfaction from hard work, “just as a serious athlete is entirely immersed in her game...” Some elements of the school designed to challenge the academic athlete include:

- longer school day (approx. 7:40 to 5:30);
- longer school year (190-200 days);
- a rich liberal arts curriculum shaped by rigorous standards of excellence;
- double the average time spent on reading and math in grades five and six;
- college planning beginning in the seventh grade;
- school uniforms; and
- promotion for achievement.

Students’ developing skills will be assessed in three ways:

- “On demand,” to ensure students have skills at the ready all the time;
- “Snap shot” assessments, e.g. state tests; and
- “Over time,” by means of projects such as research papers.

The charter anticipates teachers participating in Grade Level and Departmental “Kounaikenshuu,” a Japanese collaborative instructional strategy. Teachers are to receive data-driven meaningful feedback. Master Teachers and the Principal are to promote the value of team work, give feedback and “build a culture of ‘boundaryless’ learning among the adults, such that all are relentlessly and collectively focused on maximizing all students’ achievement.”

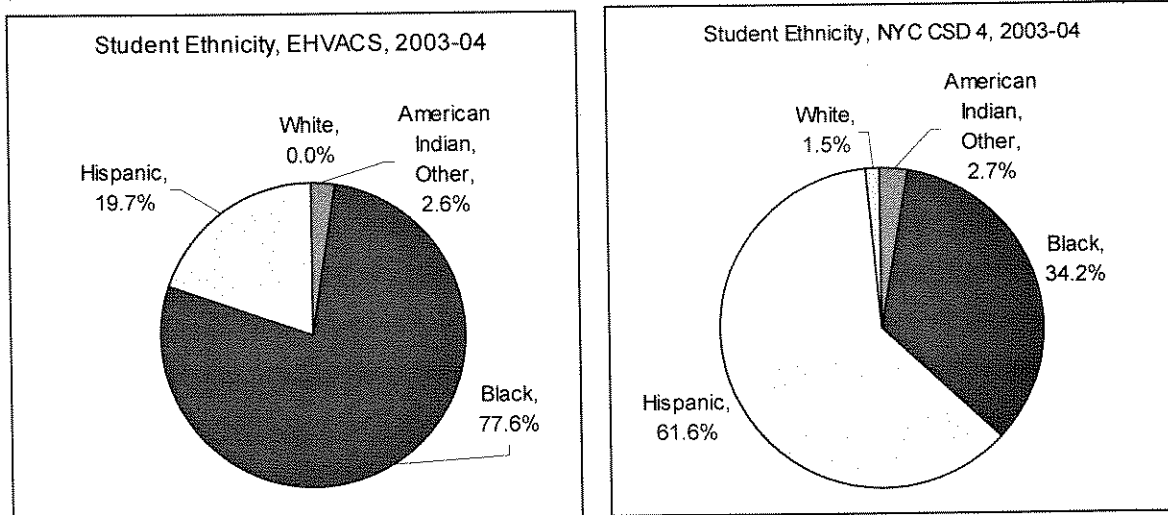
At the time of the school’s second visit, the school’s enrollment, demographics and school calendar were as follows:

### ***Enrollment***

YEAR	ORIGINAL CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	APPROVED CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ORIGINAL CHARTERED GRADES SERVED	APPROVED GRADES SERVED	ACTUAL GRADES SERVED
2002-2003	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2003-2004	104	76	76	6	5	5
2004-2005	208	125	105	6-7	5-6	5-6
2005-2006	150	312		6-8	5-7	
2006-2007	416	416		6-9	5-8	



## Demographics



The ethnicity of Harlem Village's student population is 77.8 percent African-American, 19.7 percent Hispanic, and 2.6 percent Other. During the 2003-4 school year, 88 percent of its students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch, and 82 percent in the 2004-05 school year. In comparison, 89.6 percent of the students in the Community School District 4, within whose boundaries Harlem Village is located, were eligible to participate in the program. The percentage of students who are identified as having disabilities is 11.8 percent while Community School District 4's identification rate is 14.8 percent.

## School Calendar

The school year projected in the charter would include 203 days divided into trimesters of 12 weeks each. For the 2004-05 school year, Harlem Village offered 203 instructional days.

The school day in the charter would run from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (9.5 hours), with students receiving seven hours of ELA and math and three hours of reading. One hour of small group instruction would be available at the end of each day. For 2004-05 the school day began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 4:40 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and at 2:00 p.m. on Fridays. Approximately 60 percent of the school's students attend the optional extended day program from 4:40 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The extended day program includes homework center, study hall, tutoring, and enrichment clubs, such as karate, yoga, and modern dance.

## **SUMMARY OF YEAR ONE FINDINGS**

In the spring of 2003, at the closing of the school's first year of operation, the Charter Schools Institute (Institute) conducted a visit of the school. Institute staff observed classrooms, met with administrators and interviewed teachers. In a letter to the school's board of trustees, the Institute reported the results of the school site visit.

At the end of its first year, Harlem Village Academy had made progress in establishing the academic environment outlined in its charter and designed to groom students into "academic athletes." A curriculum that emphasized foundational skills in reading and math was in place. Additionally, the school had developed an extensive repertoire of assessment tools as well as a database to record and analyze the results of these assessments.

While the overall school culture was focused on academic achievement, inspectors observed variation in instructional rigor among teachers. Some teachers' instruction was emblematic of the school's charter design and required students to be thorough and methodic in their responses. However, this was not true in all classrooms as inspectors observed classes in which students were not held to such high expectations. While the school had a behavior management system in place, it was inconsistently applied.

Prior to the visit, the school had identified the need for a full-time instructional leader, in addition to the principal whose responsibilities included instructional leadership as well as other duties. The Institute concurred with this decision. An instructional leader will be an invaluable resource in managing the concerns named above along with the challenges that accompany the school's planned expansion.

As of the first year visit, the school had experienced difficulty in obtaining student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) from its regional special education offices. Inspectors noted that the school had been diligent in its efforts to locate the records and provide services.

## **SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR FINDINGS**

Toward the end of the second year of instruction, the Institute concludes that Harlem Village has demonstrated several key strengths in the implementation of its academic program. In particular:

- In its second year of operation, Harlem Village garnered impressive results in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the New York City Citywide examinations and the Stanford 9 Achievement Test. With these results the school exceeded the comparative and value-added measures it set for itself in its Accountability Plan and is on track to meeting its goal for absolute level of performance on state examinations, which the school will administer for the first time next year.
- The school's staff demonstrated a widespread understanding and use of academic standards. The school's curriculum, created by the Village Academies Network, is based on the state and city ELA and Mathematics standards. Teachers used the language of standards when instructing and when describing their instruction to inspectors. Students take monthly standards-based assessments, the results of which are analyzed to provide teachers with areas of need at the class and individual student level. Finally, several teachers were able to identify individual standards with which students struggled and describe how they adjusted their instruction to address that need.
- In comparison to the first year visit, inspectors observed an increased effectiveness of instruction.
- Professional development systems and procedures are in place. The school has made a significant investment in its teachers' development, including a summer institute and weekly professional development.
- Overall, the school's climate and student conduct have improved. The school devoted time at the beginning of the year to training students in appropriate behavior and has since implemented a STAR and Demerit system to reinforce these standards of behavior.

While the strengths of the program are considerable, inspectors noted several areas for improvement:

- The inconsistency of instructional quality remains an issue. The school may want to consider using its professional development procedures, especially instructional coaching, to address the variations in instructional quality.
- In relation to the area of writing, staff appeared to have a well-developed understanding of the school's assessments and rubrics, however, students interviewed were unable to describe them or to identify how to demonstrate high achievement on the writing assessments.

- Classroom management improvement is still needed. Inspectors observed numerous instances of students who opted out of learning. These students were quiet but did not participate in the instruction or complete their work. While inspectors observed numerous instances of awarding demerits, they heard very little positive reinforcement. The school may want to discuss other means to engage and encourage these students.

With regards to its success as a viable organization, inspectors found the following:

- Harlem Village has addressed the need for additional instructional leadership. The school has implemented a shared instructional leadership structure comprised of the Principal and two Associate Principals of Instruction.
- The board does not have in place formal procedures for evaluating the school's leadership or programs. This is a primary function of a board, and as such, the board has not addressed one of its responsibilities.

## BENCHMARKS

What follows are the selected benchmarks used by the Institute in preparing this report. These benchmarks focus on the critical issues of teaching, learning and assessment as well as organizational and fiscal responsibility. Evidence from visits conducted during the year is summarized under each benchmark and serves as the foundation for the summary section above.

Is the School an Academic Success?		
<b>Benchmark 1A</b>  <b>Academic Attainment &amp; Improvement</b>	<b>1A.1.1</b>	<b>Absolute Measures (New York State Assessments):</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school's charter.
	<b>1A.1.2</b>	<b>Comparative Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school's charter.
	<b>1A.1.3</b>	<b>Value Added Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school's charter.
	<b>1A.1.4</b>	<b>NCLB Measure:</b> The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
	<b>1A.1.5</b>	<b>Unique Academic Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.

In its second year of operation, Harlem Village Academy Charter School (Harlem Village) garnered impressive results in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the New York City Citywide examinations and the Stanford 9 Achievement Test. With these results the school exceeded the comparative and value-added measures it set for itself in its Accountability Plan and is on track to meeting its goal for absolute level of performance on New York State examinations, which the school will administer for the first time next year.

### *Absolute Measures*

NYC Citywide Test Results	Percent of Students At/Above Levels 3&4 by Grade and Year		
	School Year (April admin.)	Grade	
		5	6
Reading	2004	38	N/A
	2005	75	67
Math	2004	19	N/A
	2005	59	90

**Source: NYC Department of Education**

Harlem Village students have not yet taken state ELA and math examinations; however, they have taken New York City exams in grades five and six. As the city exams use the same scoring system and the same scale as those used for the state exams, the city results serve as a proxy for results on state exams. According to April 2004 and April 2005 results reported by the NYC Department of Education, Harlem Village has made notable gains in the fifth

grade. In addition, students who have been in the school for two years and taken the city tests in the fifth grade in 2004 and the sixth grade in 2005 registered significant gains in performance.<sup>4</sup> If this pattern is sustained, the school is likely to meet its absolute outcome measures.

### Comparative Measure

April 2005 NYC Citywide Test Results	Sixth Grade Students	
	Comparison	Mean Scale Score
ELA	<b>Harlem Village</b>	<b>695</b>
	IS 172	643
	IS 195	664
	MS 286	654
	CSD 4	672
	CSD 5	666
Math	<b>Harlem Village</b>	<b>708</b>
	IS 172	635
	IS 195	655
	MS 286	659
	CSD 4	673
	CSD 5	661

Source: Harlem Village 2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report and NYC Department of Education

Harlem Village's outcome measure calls for the school to exceed the mean score of comparable New York City public schools in Community School Districts 4 and 5. The second-year results, as reported in the school's Accountability Plan Progress Report, indicate that it has succeeded in outperforming three identified comparison schools as well as the two community school districts by a wide margin. In addition, with a mean scale score of 695 in ELA, the average Harlem Village student far exceeded the Level 3 (proficient) cut off score of 674. More notably, the mean scale score of 708 in math for Harlem Village students is close to their scoring on average at Level 4 (advanced), where the scale score cutoff is 710.

### Value Added Measure

Date of Stanford-9 Administration	Average NCE Score *			
	Reading Sub-test		Math Sub-test	
	Grade 5 in 2004-05 (N=51)	Grade 6 in 2004-05 (N=48)	Grade 5 in 2004-05 (N=51)	Grade 6 in 2004-05 (N=48)
June 2004	N/A	59.2	N/A	80.9
September 2004	34.6	N/A	35.2	N/A
June 2005	53.2	66.5	79.5	84.3

Source: Harlem Village 2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report

\* An average NCE of 50 = grade level

<sup>4</sup> The Accountability Plan Progress Report indicates that the *cohort* percent scoring at Levels 3 and 4 increased from 43 percent to 67 percent on the ELA exams and from 25 percent to 90 percent on the math exams; however since these outcomes are based on different numbers of students, the actual composition of the cohort is not determined.

In its 2005 Progress Report, Harlem Village reports strong results for spring 2005: both fifth and sixth graders scored on average well above grade level (i.e., NCE = 50) in both reading and math. To the extent that the goal of the Accountability Plan outcome measure is to enable students to move toward grade level, Harlem Village far exceeded its goal. While the fall-to-spring gains of the fifth graders in ELA and math are likely to be greater than if they had been tested the previous spring,<sup>5</sup> they are nonetheless noteworthy. While the sixth grade cohort had already achieved above grade level on the June 2004 tests, they still met the specific criteria of the outcome measure by virtue of making a seven NCE gain in ELA and showing a gain in math while already having scored above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile.

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<sup>5</sup> Because fall results tend to be lower than the results students would have received the previous spring, the reported gains from September 2004 to June 2005 are likely to overstate actual year-to-year gains.

Is the School an Academic Success?	
<b>Benchmark 1B</b>  <b>Use of Assessment Data</b>	<b>1B</b>  <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the collection and analysis of student performance data, including data gathered from an analysis of student work pursuant to a set of well-defined and well-aligned standards;</li> <li>the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved;</li> <li>the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction;</li> <li>the regular communication between teachers and administrators of assessment results and a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of those results; and</li> <li>the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement.</li> </ul> <p>More generally, a school should be able to demonstrate a system where performance standards, instruction, required student work and assessments are integrated and have led to increased student achievement.</p>

As indicated in its “First Year Letter” from the Institute, the Harlem Village Academy Charter School has “created an extensive database that tracks student attainment of standards and enables school leaders and faculty to become aware of patterns in student achievement, social behavior, and instruction.” Based upon evidence provided during the school’s second end-of-year visit, the school has continued to refine its comprehensive assessment system and its use of the data provided by it.

The school is no longer using Personal Learning Plans and has replaced them with Data-driven Instructional Planning (DIP). Every month students take a diagnostic assessment as well as a midterm and final assessment each trimester. The monthly diagnostic assessments in mathematics and English language arts are mastery-based and teachers report that they are aligned with city and state standards.

In ELA, the “Leveled Reading Assessment” is designed to determine students’ reading comprehension levels. Each student reads two brief selections (fiction and non-fiction) and answers ten questions per selection. Rather than simple factual questions, they examine students’ understandings of the “most sophisticated nuances” of the text. A score of, at least, 16 out of a possible 20 denotes mastery of that reading level and indicates to the teacher that the student is ready to move to the next level.

The Mathematics diagnostics assessment is designed to determine mastery or non-mastery of particular standards. Each tested standard has five questions, and four correct is considered mastery. Following each administration of the Mathematics assessment, teachers prepare a “Data Driven Instructional Planning (DIP) Analysis.” Rather than a simple class average, the results are displayed in a matrix that enables the teacher to view the percentage correct by question, standard and by student. The “DIP Analysis” forces each classroom Mathematics teacher to look at the



performance of his/her students to determine which standards/skills to reteach to the whole class or to a small group. When appropriate, teachers must also identify specific skills for small group instruction, when that instruction will be provided and to whom – the name of each student to be in the small groups. Alternatively, an individual student may be referred for tutoring to address a particular weakness.

During the school visit, the school leader and administrators displayed data-rich charts of the school's students by name and each student's academic and behavioral performance. In English language arts and mathematics, skills were broken down within each standard area or category and student assessment scores were listed for each evaluation period. Teachers modified instruction to ensure that students mastered skill areas in which they were weak; students were subsequently re-assessed prior to progressing to more difficult skills and concepts. School administrators and teachers discussed student performance, formally, on Fridays when students were dismissed early, and informally, throughout the week.

Teachers acknowledged that analyzing the diagnostics is "labor intensive" but believe the information merits the work required. They asserted that the results "drive the tutoring and curriculum." Inspectors found that the faculty spoke the language of assessment and could give numerous examples of its influence on their teaching. Teachers extended the usage of the Reading Level assessment by analyzing the types of questions being asked. For example, students did not understand "according to..." questions, so the teacher included more of those types of questions in her instruction. The ELA teachers each had a method, such as checklist, for noting the skills on which students need additional instruction, and could give multiple examples when asked by inspectors. Some teachers used their lists to plan guided reading lessons and/or to refer to during guided reading lessons to make in the moment teaching decisions.

School leadership tracks the teachers' use of the DIP process. The appropriate Associate Principal of Instruction gets a copy of each teacher's results. At DIP meetings, they review the analysis matrix and discuss the instructional modifications to be made.

While the diagnostic assessments appear to be thoughtfully developed and utilized, two aspects of the school's assessment system cause concern. First, the school does not appear to have a system for compiling samples of student work that could serve as a running record of success and could demonstrate learning over time. In a few classes, inspectors reviewed folders of collected student work. The folders seemed to be haphazard collections of student work containing samples that were often undated and uncorrected. Secondly, while inspectors noted that the faculty understood and utilized the results of the assessments, it is unclear what degrees of understanding the students possess, especially in the area of writing. Numerous students could not explain the rubrics used in regard to writing when asked by a school inspector, nor could they explain how to earn a proficient score.

Is the School an Academic Success?		
<b>Benchmark 1C</b>	<b>1C</b>	<p>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet the demands of state standards.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.</p>
<b>Benchmark 1D</b>	<b>1D.1</b>	<p><b>Strong instructional leadership girds the school's work in improving student learning and achievement.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has instructional leadership that has demonstrated the capacity to lead the comprehensive implementation of the school's curriculum and has facilitated the alignment of classroom instruction, learning activities, instructional resources, support, and assessments. Instructional leaders at the school ensure that teacher planning time, lesson development, and internal assessment systems lead to the successful attainment of the school's mission and academic goals.</p>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>1D.2</b>	<p><b>Quality instruction is evident throughout the school fostering an academic learning environment and actively supporting the academic achievement of children.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark is one in which classroom practice reflects competent teaching and instructional strategies that engage students. The academic learning environment at the school is one in which effective teaching and learning are valued and supported; there is a clear and strong focus on achievement goals, and student and staff accomplishments are recognized.</p>
	<b>1D.3</b>	<p><b>The school has strategies in place to identify and meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals, and students who are English Language Learners.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has implemented special programs and provides the necessary resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are demonstrably effective in helping students meet goals.</p>

### ***Curriculum***

The curriculum of the Harlem Academy Charter School places literacy and numeracy in the forefront, followed closely by social studies and science. In the fifth and sixth grades, students receive instruction in reading and writing as separate and distinct subjects; the school leader indicated that such will not be the case for seventh grade students. In addition to core curriculum areas, students may have the opportunity to participate in "Electives" or "After School Programs" in various art forms, such as drama, dance, karate and yoga. The freedom to participate in these programs is often linked to their achievement of both academic and behavioral expectations.

Village Academies Network has developed two core documents that guide the school: a *Faculty Guide*, as well as a *Standards and Curriculum Guide* that includes common Village Academy Network standards, aligned internal assessments, curriculum and a pacing calendar. The scope and sequence were created by the Village Academy Network with active input from teachers. Some of the curriculum was in place from the beginning, and the balance was created by the teachers and school leaders during the summers. In some discipline areas, such as Mathematics, the curriculum was completed before the summer institute and provided to teachers at that time. In other cases, the school's instructional leaders worked collaboratively with teachers to develop the curriculum during the summer. In creating the curriculum, the faculty considered state and city standards as well as internal assessments and the ELA exam. They were aware of the specific categories and skills that students would be expected to know and built the curriculum based on them. School inspectors heard from numerous teachers that the curriculum is a "work in progress." They continue to make adaptations by backwards planning based on the assessment results. Additionally, two teachers plan to review the curricula and pacing guides developed for writing and modify them based on what they learned during the 2004-05 school year.

At Harlem Village, standards are not a mystery. Throughout the school, New York State Standards for the core curriculum areas are visible, and teachers spoke of them in their classes and in their discussions with each other and Institute visitors. The Faculty Guide breaks reading down into 10 standards and inspectors observed teachers referring to those standards while teaching. Some teachers report reviewing the standards as they plan each week.

In the reading skills analysis course, students are taught the skills inherent in each standard and then taught how to use those skills. Based on the scope and sequence, the teachers knew that they would be able to tackle each standard twice. At the end of the year, the focus of the curriculum is applying all of the standards-based skills to the reading of a novel.

School inspectors complemented the school on the development of a consistent curriculum. In reviewing classrooms, each classroom reflected a common structure for the room in terms of the white board listing the "aim," and "do now" for the subject being taught, as well as a variety of posters and charts defining high expectations and guidelines for reading and writing. The level of specificity of the directions included in the "aim" and "do now" tasks, however, varied widely across the school. However, the nature of a one-day visit did not allow the team to fully investigate this issue.

### ***Quality of Instruction***

Inspectors conducted a one-day visit that provided an opportunity for each team member to observe a limited number of classes. In the Charter School Institute's Year One Letter, inspectors noted that "instructional rigor tended to vary from teacher to teacher." In its second year, the team once again found this to be true. However, there has been noticeable improvement. Overall the quality of instruction has improved but it is still inconsistent.

Teachers consistently started the class period with some sort of a "Do Now." In each class the Do Now was reviewed or discussed in some way. In one class students went up to the board to show their work. In another class students discussed a story they were reading and students were also asked if they agreed with answers that were given by their peers. While all classes completed some form of a Do Now, the process by which they were completed varied. One inspector noted that none of the Do Nows that he observed were collected and that it was unclear how they were used to check understanding, particularly of those students who are struggling in the class. In contrast a second inspector observed teachers who roamed around the room as students completed their Do Nows to provide encouragement and feedback as needed. This discrepancy is not limited to the Do Now portion of the class. Some teachers provided little feedback to students while other teachers circulated to check on each student's work.

Each class did have an agenda and an aim or objective on the board. The quality and detail of the agendas varied from class to class. In one class there was a very detailed agenda with an objective and specific outcomes for the class. In other classes the agenda was sparse and did not have a clear aim or objective for students to follow. The quality of the agenda and detail of outcome correlated to the quality of teaching and learning in each class. In the classroom with the most specific agenda, the students had a clear outcome, the class flowed with little interruption and students were engaged in their learning. In the classroom where the agenda was not as focused the class seemed to end without students having a clear understanding of what occurred in class or what skills and/or content they learned.

The expectation that students would participate was consistent. In each class teachers made an effort to call on each student, even those who were not engaged or did not raise their hands during class. This was evident in one class when the teacher made sure she called on each student before the end of the class. She made sure to call specifically on students who had not raised their hand during the class. In another class the teacher consistently called on students and would ask, "who haven't I called on?" However, the types of questions asked and answers accepted varied. In several observed classes, it was particularly clear that the teacher held students to high standards. They expected students to supply evidence to back up their assertions. If students' responses were incorrect or insufficient, these teachers would ask probing questions to encourage students to persevere and to promote more rigorous thinking. In contrast, during a few observed classes, teachers did more of the thinking for students who, it appeared, the teachers did not expect to contribute to this degree.

Finally, inspectors reviewed student binders in several classes. In some classes, the binder appeared to be an academic tool whose purpose and use was clear. In other classes, all reviewed binders were disorganized and incomplete. Composition books had few entries and none for the past several months. This disorganization and lack of follow-through is not indicative of the "discipline" required of an "academic athlete."

### ***Instructional Leadership***

At the end of the school's first year, it had identified the need for a full-time instructional leader to provide the type of ongoing, classroom-based support for teachers necessary to establish and sustain effective teaching and learning. The school did follow through and hire an individual prior to the start of the second school year. That individual, according to teachers, provided professional development and worked on developing the school's curriculum as part of the school's summer institute, which lasted approximately five weeks. This individual, however, was not a good match for the school's needs and left soon after school opened for the 2004-05 school year. After the loss of the intended school leader, the principal analyzed the needs and characteristics of an instructional leader. She identified 18 qualities necessary for success, five of which she considers non-negotiable.

The school has since designed and implemented a shared instructional leadership structure in which the administrative responsibilities have been identified and assigned to one of two individuals, referred to as the Associate Principals of Instruction (APIs). One of the APIs focuses on reading, writing and social studies while the other is responsible for mathematics and science. Teachers do not appear confused by the structure or who is responsible for which aspects of instructional support or administrative duties. In addition to his API responsibilities, one of the APIs teaches mathematics; the other API functions in the instructional/administrative leader capacity on a full-time basis.

The APIs are supervised by the principal and are being groomed to be the principals of the two Village Academy Network schools next year. The intention is that one API will head this school in the 2005-06 year and the other will head its new sister school (part of the Village Academy Network) scheduled to open at that time. The principal of one of these high-performing charter schools serves as a leadership coach for the APIs.

APIs appear to be key resources in Harlem Village's development and inspectors noted that they have helped to refine all of the school's programs. During interviews with teachers, it was evident that the APIs frequently observed teachers and provided feedback, responded to teachers' instructional questions, reviewed lesson plans and provided comments, and were generally available to teaching staff. The API who is responsible for the school's writing program meets weekly with the team of writing teachers to work through the following week's lessons. The school's mathematics teachers stated that they have observed the API, who is responsible for the school's math program, teach and it provides them with much insight regarding mathematics instruction and classroom management.

### ***Professional Development***

Harlem Village has made a significant investment in their teachers' development and have numerous systems in place to support their learning. During the summer, staff attends the Summer Institute, five weeks of professional development in which they analyze external assessments, align their internal assessments and study guides, and create final exams for their courses.

During the school year, students are dismissed early on Friday afternoons and staff participate in three different sessions: Strategic Weekly Planning, Student Information and Action, and Workout. Each of the three structured meetings is about 45 minutes long and has a particular form and purpose. (It should be noted that some teachers report that each of the three meetings does not necessarily take place each week and may be supplanted by Lesson Study.) In Strategic Weekly Planning, each academic department critiques its own instruction and discusses what was successful/unsuccessful. In Student Information and Action, each grade level team reviews a data manual containing individual students' performance in the areas of preparedness for class, homework, behavior, and attendance for reading, math, writing and learning lab. Depending on the results, the team then creates an immediate solution for an individual student, classroom or school as a whole. One example was the decision to institute a 10-day Homework Challenge. The "Workout" session is based on a practice of Jack Welch of the General Electric Co. The entire faculty meets to resolve a problem quickly. The goal is to make a decision and implement it to solve the problem within 24-72 hours. In addition to the Friday afternoon sessions, teachers have official department meetings at another time during the week.

Teachers also report participating in three types of peer observations. First, each teacher observed a particular aspect of all of his/her peers' instruction for five minutes apiece. Teachers reported that the purpose of these types of observations is to increase the consistency of procedures, language and management strategies. They exchange feedback via email. In addition to these brief observations, each teacher completes a monthly peer observation in which s/he spends the entire period in a colleague's room in which there is a global focus rather than a specific one. Finally, teachers have been afforded the opportunity to visit a number of high-performing charter schools to observe their methods.

One of the APIs' responsibilities is to provide instructional coaching to teachers. One API reports that she observes classes daily and can name the strengths and needs of individual teachers. Due to his additional teaching duties, the other API is able to observe less frequently. However, teachers are able to observe him. Both APIs use email to communicate with teachers following observations. While some teachers spoke appreciatively about the assistance that the APIs provide, inspectors have limited information regarding the content or effect of their instructional coaching (versus observations). The principal reports that each teacher has a formal individual meeting every three to five weeks that is evaluatory and related to their performance-based bonus.

Teachers receive guided lesson planning support in which their department meets with an API before they begin their planning. The APIs review the lesson plans in light of the curriculum. Lesson plans are due on Friday morning to the appropriate API so that they receive feedback before the following week. For example, teachers report that they often receive comments via email on Sunday afternoon.

In addition to the formal professional development, the physical structure of the school is designed to facilitate conversation among teachers. Teachers share offices with teachers who teach the same discipline area and are able to discuss their subjects and classes in depth on a regular basis.

### ***Special Populations: Students with Disabilities***

One of the key design elements of the Harlem Village Academy was the establishment of an inclusion model of providing services and programs to students with disabilities. The school began the 2004-05 year without special education staff, and following a monitoring visit by the State Education Department hired a special education teacher. The teacher, however, was not certified in special education in the state of New York. In October 2004, the school engaged the services of a special education consultant to first and foremost ensure that the school is in compliance with state and federal special education laws and regulations. The consultant, based in Washington, D.C., provides similar services to other charter schools on a national basis, and is at Harlem Village Academy twice each month. The consultant holds New York State certification.

The special education consultant works with the school's own special education teacher who is responsible for ensuring that students receive the programs and services to be provided by or through the school pursuant to their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The school, at the time of the visit, enrolled 11 students who were classified as having an educational disability. The school claims that because of the strength of its reading program, several students have been de-classified or are in the process of being de-classified from special education.

Harlem Village Academy now provides classroom teachers with an “IEP at a Glance” summary document, as well as a copy of a student’s current IEP. The school is yet in the process of working with the district Committee on Special Education in updating IEPs for all classified students. At the time of the visit, the school announced that it has identified and hired a New York State certified special education teacher who will join the staff in July 2005. The consultant is hopeful that this teacher will possess the necessary skills and expertise to ensure that classroom teachers receive the information and training needed to ensure the establishment of a seamless inclusion program within the school. If the school’s student population grows such that more restrictive special education services are necessary, the school may want to consider expanding the range of special education support available to students with disabilities enrolled in the program, such as adding a resource room.



Is the School an Academic Success?	
<b>Benchmark 1F</b>  <b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b>	<b>1F</b>  <b>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</b>  The school that meets this benchmark has documented discipline policies and procedures (for regular and special education students) and has consistently enforced those policies. As implemented and enforced, the discipline policy will have promoted calm, safe classrooms where students are required to (and not distracted from) participating fully in all learning activities. Students at a school meeting this benchmark will also generally report a reasonable sense of security. A school will also be able to provide appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.

Since the first year school inspection, Harlem Village has made significant strides in classroom management and in maintaining student attention. The school's procedures appear to be tighter and more explicit.

### ***Preventative Discipline***

The principal describes the school's management philosophy as "preventative discipline" and asserts that it is based on the concept that "great discipline is what you do to prevent problems." She outlined the preventative measures that the school has implemented, including communicating teachers' expectations, creating classroom and school routines, and presenting tight, engaging lessons.

By the end of its first year, both administrators and teachers found that the discipline system needed to be refined to place greater emphasis on the prevention of bad or unproductive behavior rather than on the consequences of such behavior. Teachers identified four categories in which they would like to see students' performance improve: preparedness, homework, effort and behavior. At the beginning of the school's second year, the school provided training to students in each of these areas. The staff explained in detail the type of performance that they expected to see in each area and used role plays to demonstrate these behaviors to students. Teachers reported that they were very strict at the beginning of the year.

In addition, also at the beginning of the 2004-05 school year, teachers had to submit a plan of strategies to address student management and discipline. Over time, teachers stated that those strategies have become more uniform, although not necessarily identical. One common element that was noted in all classrooms was the use of the "warm up" and "cool down" processes as students entered and prepared to leave classes. Although some teachers were more facile with the practice than others, all teachers provided cues, with time limits, to assist students in transitioning in and out of classes.

Harlem Village staff consider the clear communication of roles, routines and expectations that prevents problems in the first place to be their primary management system. It is used in conjunction with the "backup" STAR and Demerit system.

### ***STAR and Demerit System***

The STAR and Demerit report was designed as a key component of a school wide behavior management system that provides incentives, i.e. rewards and punishments, for students to maintain a culture of learning in the school. Students can earn points to become a "star" or demerits in each of the four categories mentioned above (preparedness, homework, effort and behavior). Students carry clipboards with them during the day that teachers use to assign both positive and negative points. Some teachers report that there was previously a more random use of

demerits but that since April break there has been more consistency. They report that now demerits are used only if preventative discipline hasn't been effective.

The STAR and Demerit report goes home weekly for parent signature and for return. If a student acquires three demerits, s/he is assigned detention. A note is sent home explaining the reason for detention. If a student earns three detentions, s/he must serve an in-school suspension. Again, parents are contacted that day. The number of students who merit in-school suspension varies but typically hasn't been more than ten in a week. When students get an in-school suspension, one of the APIs may have developed a behavior plan. It should be noted that teachers are required to make monthly calls to parents, but teachers indicated that they speak with parents more frequently to provide both positive feedback as well as to address any issues.

Each week the Star and Demerit report is also merged with information from the classroom reports to determine which students are the "Star" students. The "Star" students appear in the newsletter and earn eligibility to attend Star Trips. Star Trips are special events for well-behaved students in contrast to School Trips that are educational in nature and that everyone is eligible to attend. The principal estimates that 40-50 percent of students attend Star Trips.

### ***Improved Student Behavior***

School inspectors observed that students were orderly in classrooms and hallways. Teachers were able to deliver their lessons and maintain control over their classrooms. This is a notable accomplishment and a significant change from the school's first year. During the school visit, transitions were consistently silent and orderly. Staff were in the hallways during each of the transitions and closely monitored the students as they moved from classroom to classroom. Teachers dismissed students from class by asking them to "Cool Down." Students then packed up and were dismissed. Transitions seemed to be a strong area of the school and something they worked hard on throughout the school year.

However, even though the school has made major strides in addressing the student behavior issues of its first year, the problem has not totally receded into the background. Inspectors noted two areas in need of improvement. First, in some classes, students opted out of learning. While they did not overtly misbehave, they engaged in covert misconduct in which they simply chose not to do the work. Second, while inspectors observed numerous instances of awarding demerits, they heard very little positive reinforcement. Inspectors noted several classes in which there was a sharp edge to teachers' tones. It seemed that in an effort to remain the "boss" of the classroom, some teachers took on a sharp tone. While inspectors complimented the school on its improvement in management, this lack of engagement and positive reinforcement interferes with learning and a positive school culture, and could ultimately undermine the school's efforts.



<p><b>Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Governance (Board of Trustees &amp; School Leadership)</b></p>	<p><b>2C.1</b></p> <p><b>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</b></p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics) and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school's charter. Where possible, the board has avoided creating conflicts-of-interest. The school board has also maintained and abided by the corporation's by-laws. In addition, a board meeting this benchmark will have actively sought information from the staff, parents, community and student populations. The system for hearing such views and concerns will have been consistently implemented so that all views and concerns were appropriately heard and acted upon. The board will have published, reviewed and communicated policies annually and currently maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p> <p><b>2C.2</b></p> <p><b>The board and school leadership clearly articulate the school's mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</b></p> <p>To fully meet this benchmark, school leaders and board members should be able to evidence a strong understanding of the school design and demonstrate that they have referred to it regularly in managing and governing the school. Moreover, the board and the school's administration should have deployed resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school. At the board level, the board should have a process for selecting both board members and the school leader or school leadership team that is timely and effective and such process should result in a stable and effective board and leadership team. The board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school board and school leadership should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.</p>
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### ***Oversight of Academic Program***

When asked how the board provides oversight to the school and its academic programs, board members referred to the Accountability Plan as the central piece. The board was clear that the accountability plan outlines the school's goals, and therefore their efforts are guided by that plan. Inspectors cautioned the board that the Accountability Plan is based on state tests that the students take once a year and is not best suited for evaluating progress month to month. The school has a variety of alternative possibilities for that purpose, such as homework completion rates, diagnostics assessment results, attendance rates and numerous others.

Currently, the principal reports to the board each month regarding academic performance and student behavior results. One board member stated that their previous reporting systems have been effective, albeit informal. The principal and the board plan to formalize the system for her reporting. Inspectors encourage them to do so as a more clearly defined process will better enable the board to see progress over time.

### ***Principal Evaluation***

According to the benchmarks, "The board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school board and school leadership

should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.” At the time of the school’s second end-of-year visit, Harlem Village’s board did not have a formal system of indicators to evaluate the school’s principal. While the board is aware of this issue, as evidenced by its inclusion in the April board meeting, it had not been resolved. Board members reported that they plan to develop a formal reporting system that will tie it into the accountability plan. Inspectors again cautioned the board that the goals of the accountability plan are summative and that it may be difficult to base a yearly evaluation on them. Finally, inspectors advised the school board that a formal procedure for principal evaluation must be put in place as soon as possible.

### ***Structure***

The Harlem Village board currently functions as a committee of the whole while individual board members take the lead in their area of expertise (Development/Fundraising, Facilities, etc.). Several of Harlem Village board members are also on the board of its sister school. Once that school opens and Harlem Village increases in size, the demands of the role and the complexity of the work are likely to increase. At that time, this board may want to consider a more formal committee structure.

Is the School Fiscally Sound?		
<b>Benchmark 3A</b>  <b>Board Oversight</b>	<b>3A</b>	The board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school's mission, program and goals.
	<b>3B</b>	The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.
	<b>3C</b>	The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management's direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.
	<b>3D</b>	The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.
	<b>3E</b>	The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).

On May 12, 2005, Mr. Bill Lake, Director of Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability for the Institute, met with Dr. Deborah Kenny, Executive Director of the Harlem Village Academy Charter School. In addition to documentation at the school, previously submitted reports and documents were also reviewed.

A review of the board minutes for the school indicates that the board takes an active role in the school's financial operations. A financial report is prepared and presented at each board meeting and the report provides meaningful information and analysis of the status of the school's financial condition.

The school has established a finance committee but it has not met exclusive of the board. The treasurer's responsibilities include the annual audit, the budget and other financial matters, and these are discussed at regular board meetings. Board members have not received specific training related to fiscal issues, but collectively possess a sufficient level of financial acumen, with the treasurer being highly qualified in this regard. Audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.

Since its inception, the school has operated pursuant to its long range fiscal plan included in its application. Modifications were made to reflect facility constraints and resulting reduced enrollment that was not initially anticipated. The school completed its first operating year in stable financial position and operated on a balanced budget. Actual revenues exceeded budgeted revenues and actual revenues exceeded actual expenses. The net surplus (unrestricted) was \$258,475 or 19 percent of the school's initial budget. The school generated positive cash flow from operations of \$335,674 and invested \$260,406 in the purchase of property and equipment. Unaudited quarterly statements for year two indicate the school is on track to improve its financial position modestly.

Internal control can be expected to provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance to the school's management and board that objectives will be achieved. Since the school's inception, the Executive Director has had ultimate

responsibility for all fiscal matters of the school. In addition to the Executive Director, the school has an Operations Director, Controller (part-time) and Bookkeeper (part-time) involved with its financial operations. The school started with a small enrollment and is growing slowly over the term of its charter. The small size of the school did not necessitate establishing sophisticated systems and could not support unnecessary overhead. Looking ahead, the school continues to anticipate having a lean administrative team. As a result, the school will continue to need to establish and maintain compensating controls where needed, such as instances where duties cannot be fully segregated due to the limited number of staff. Duties have generally been segregated to the extent practical or compensating controls have been established. The school has established other appropriate accounting policies and procedures. A system to record, track and safeguard assets has been established but not fully implemented.

Although the school filed some of its quarterly reports late, the school has otherwise met its financial reporting requirements with no material exceptions.

The school has a few areas it can improve to enhance its fiscal soundness. The most significant improvement opportunities relate to:

1. Updating the school's accounting policy and procedures manual and revising certain of its policies.
2. Expanding its use of property control tags to better account for capital assets owned by the school.
3. Improving capital asset records to better identify the number of items purchased, location of items, etc.
4. Improving periodic financial reporting (including annual reporting) to provide more details and allow for in-depth analysis.
5. Assessing whether the school's accounting software effectively can meet the school's needs as it grows larger.
6. Ensuring that board packages, in addition to board minutes, are submitted to the Charter Schools Institute as required by the monitoring plan in the school's charter in a timely manner.

## **VISIT DATA**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second Year Visit at Harlem Village Academy Charter School on May 16, 2005. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

### **JAMES D. MERRIMAN, IV**

*Executive Director, CSI*

James D. Merriman IV is executive director of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. The Institute was created by the Board of Trustees of the State University to administer its duties as an authorizer of public charter schools under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998. Mr. Merriman joined the Charter Schools Institute in May 1999 as its general counsel; thereafter he served as a senior vice president.

Prior to his work with the Institute, Mr. Merriman was associated with the law firm of Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton practicing in the general commercial litigation group. Mr. Merriman has also worked for the New York Chamber of Commerce and the New York City Partnership. In addition, Mr. Merriman served as chief-of-staff to Frank Macchiarola (former Chancellor for the New York City school system) during his bid to be elected Comptroller of New York City.

Mr. Merriman holds a B.A. from Columbia College and a J.D. from New York University. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.

### **JENNIFER SNEED, PH.D.**

*Vice President for Applications, CSI*

Dr. Sneed is a veteran educator with 29 years of experience as a public school special education teacher and administrator [Illinois & New York], an Assistant Manager for Deaf Services at the postsecondary level [Indiana], and as a state level education policymaker [New York]. She received both her Bachelor of Science in Education of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Master of Science in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from Illinois State University in Bloomington, Illinois. Dr. Sneed earned both her Certificate of Advanced Study and her Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration with a focus on Education Policy, Politics and Law from the State University of New York – Albany.

### **SUSAN SEYMOUR**

*Special Assistant to the Executive Director, CSI*

Susan Seymour is the Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the Charter Schools Institute, State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through tenth grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New

York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

**MARK D. CLARKE**

*Building Excellent Schools Fellow  
Boston, Massachusetts*

As a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Mr. Clarke has focused on creating and designing an original charter school application for a charter school of mathematics. In the process he has experience in developing all elements of a charter school, including the budget, the facilities plan for attainment and acquisition, curriculum, instruction and assessment. Prior to becoming a Fellow, Mr. Clarke had over ten years of educational experience including as a teacher of mathematics of students at the elementary, middle and high school levels. He taught at the Fessenden and Harbor Schools, and as part of a weekend Urban League Program. Mr. Clarke has also served as a Team Leader while at the Harbor School, and as a Mathematics Coach for the Boston Public Schools.

Mr. Clarke received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island.

**HILLIARY JOHNSON**

*Consultant*

Hillary Johnson presently is employed by SchoolWorks as a consultant to the School District of Philadelphia. Here she is designing videos of excellent literacy instruction and video-based professional development to support principals in developing instructional monitoring skills and school quality review to aid instruction and planning.

In the past she was a literacy content coach with Marshall & Manning Elementary schools, Adams Elementary School and several Boston Public Schools. She was also a bilingual Spanish teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher.

She has her B.A. from University of California, Berkeley, her M.A. from Harvard Graduate School of Education and her Doctorate of Education – Urban Superintendents Program from Harvard University.