



**Charter Schools Institute**  
**State University of New York**

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## **REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

# **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE AS TO THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER RENEWAL OF THE TAPESTRY CHARTER SCHOOL**

**SEPTEMBER 14, 2005**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

In order to assist the Board of Trustees in their responsibilities under the Act, the Board of Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York (the “Institute”). Among its duties, the Institute is charged with evaluating charter schools’ applications for renewal and providing its resulting findings and recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the Board of Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, the merits of a school’s case for renewal. It has been created and issued pursuant to the “Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewals of Charters for State University Authorized Charter Schools” (the “State University Renewal Practices”).<sup>2</sup> More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

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<sup>1</sup> See § 2850 of the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

<sup>2</sup>The State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (revised January 25, 2005) are available at [www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org).

## Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application:

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

The Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.<sup>4</sup>

As a charter authorizing entity, the Board of Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings:

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner; and
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.<sup>5</sup>

Where the Board of Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.<sup>6</sup> The Regents may approve or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation. In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the initial charter expires. In the latter case (return to the Board of Trustees), the Board of Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the Board of Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> § 2851(4) of the Act.

<sup>4</sup> Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/howto/renewal.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See § 2852(2) of the Act.

<sup>6</sup> See § 2852(5) of the Act.

<sup>7</sup> See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

## Process for Renewal

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

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan")<sup>8</sup> setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").<sup>9</sup> This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures. Reports and debriefings for the school's Board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute provides general advice as to potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

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

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

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/reports.html> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/Model%20Progress%20Report1.pdf> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

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

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

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of benchmarks that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the Accountability Plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.<sup>10</sup>

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.effectiveschools.com>.

## **READER'S GUIDE**

This renewal report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Recommendations and Executive Summary, Findings and Discussion and completed Renewal Benchmarks. As this guide, the Introduction, and School Description speak for themselves, no guidance is provided for these sections. Guidance as to the remaining sections is set forth below.

### **1. Executive Summary and Recommendations**

The Institute's Recommendations are the end result of its review process. In this section, the Institute provides not only its recommendation as to whether the charter should be renewed, but the recommended terms of any renewal, *i.e.*, short or long-term, grades and number of students it is recommended the school be authorized to serve, conditions under which the charter is renewed, *etc.* Following the recommendations themselves is a short executive summary that lays out in abbreviated form reasons for the recommendation as well as the findings that support the recommendation.

Pursuant to the State University Renewal Practices, the recommendations made by the Institute can take the following forms.

- *Early renewal*: available to schools in the fourth year of the charter that can at that point make a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal. Schools that gain early renewal will then have five full years of instruction before facing renewal again, thus allowing them to concentrate on instruction and providing them with more ready access to capital markets.
- *Short-term planning year renewal*: available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools will be able with limited review to obtain renewal in order to allow them to gather at least four full years of data before facing a full-blown renewal review.
- *Renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year. Schools that have a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal will be eligible for renewal term of five years.
- *Renewal with conditions*: available to schools that 1) have a compelling and unambiguous educational record of success but that have material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that practically cannot be completely corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to a determination that the school is fiscally, legally and organizationally sound, or 2) have demonstrated sufficient academic performance for renewal, but require conditions to improve the academic

program. Such conditions may include but are not limited to restrictions on the number of students and grades served.

- *Short-term renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year that present an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement, but that have effectively implemented measures to correct those deficiencies and such measures are likely to lead to educational success and students' academic improvement with additional time. Typically, but not always, short-term renewal will be for two years. A short-term renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring renewal*: available to schools that have not presented a case for renewal of any kind, but that are voluntarily willing to enter into a restructuring plan whereby the current school would cease instruction at the end of the school's final year of instruction under the current charter and its Board of Trustees would wind up operations of the school. Thereafter, the school's Board would legally commit itself to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including a new Board of Trustees, administrative team, academic program, enrollment and organizational structure, and potentially a new location, which school then could meet and exceed state standards and all the requirements of the Act. Once restructured the education corporation would have authority to recommence instruction.
- *Non-renewal*: where a school does not present a case for renewal (short term, conditional, or otherwise), the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

In addition to discussing the recommendations themselves (and any conditions made part of those recommendations), the executive summary also contains the findings required by subdivision 2852(2) of the Education Law, including whether the school, if renewed, is likely to improve student learning and achievement.

## **2. Finding and Discussion**

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

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



Below each group of findings is a summary of the evidence supporting the finding. This evidence is a synthesis of information gathered over the life of the school's charter and is analyzed through the lens of the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks (available on the Institute's website).

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

### **3. Renewal Benchmarks**

The Renewal Benchmark section contains each renewal benchmark together with a review of the pertinent evidence gathered during the renewal cycle. As noted earlier, the benchmarks, similar to the findings, are grouped under the four renewal questions.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Tapestry Charter School opened its doors with 104 students in September 2001. During its first year of operation, the school enrolled students in kindergarten through grade four with plans to add grades five and six as specified in its charter. The school currently enrolls 192 students in kindergarten through grade seven. In October 2003, Tapestry requested, and subsequently received, permission to add a seventh grade in 2004-05 and grade eight in 2005-06.

The Tapestry Charter School mission is as follows:

The Tapestry Charter School is a learning center providing challenging educational opportunities in a multi-age setting. It provides an environment where students are encouraged to become self-directed, independent learners. Progressive, interdisciplinary teaching techniques are utilized, along with the best resources available to fit the individual learning style of each student. The academic program will blend age groups, with student movement in different subject areas, according to ability and interest. Parent involvement will be a significant component in the success of the Tapestry Charter School.

Tapestry Charter School students will develop:

- reading and writing skills\*
- foundations and expertise in mathematical and scientific thought\*
- beginning skills in foreign language\*
- creative expression in the visual and performing arts\*
- respect for others, responsibility (both personal and global), and self-discipline
- skills in conflict resolution and violence prevention

*\*meeting or exceeding the New York State Education Department's Standards*

Field trips will provide first hand learning to complement the curriculum. Visiting literary, visual and performing artists and scholars will be an integral part of the Tapestry Charter School program.

The program will strive to engender the security and self-confidence that are essential for lifelong critical and creative learning. Teachers will help students take responsibility for their own education, enabling them to cope effectively with a changing world. As a reflection of our society, The Tapestry Charter School will enroll students from families of diverse cultural, racial, socio-economic backgrounds.

The charter calls for a 180 day school year, and a school day that runs from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. In October 2001, the school received permission to shorten the academic day by 30 minutes by cutting 15 minutes from the two "special area" classes.

The school is located in a two-story brick building that once housed the administrative offices of Bryant and Stratton College and is legally classified as a school with the City of Buffalo Building Department. The administrative offices, school library, and all classrooms (with the exception of grade four) are located on the first floor. The fourth grade classroom and the classrooms for the “Super Subjects” —art, dance, music, and physical education,—are in the basement along with the dining room.

The classrooms at Tapestry Charter School are spacious, brightly lit, and well resourced. The walls are decorated with both commercial and teacher-made posters as well as student work. Each classroom has a word wall that reflects the key vocabulary that students are learning in the content areas as well as a leveled library that provides students with a variety of books to choose from. The creation of the word walls and classroom libraries supports the school’s efforts to build and strengthen students’ literacy development.

Tapestry uses a multi-age approach to provide instruction to students. Consequently, classes are organized in grades K/1, 2/3, and 5/6. (There are currently two K/1, 2/3, and 5/6 classes). Grade four is a stand alone grade at the school due to the New York State testing that is required in that year. Seventh grade is a stand alone class during 2004-05, but will be paired with the eighth grade when the school expands in September 2005. The curriculum for grades five through eight is based on the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound<sup>11</sup> model.

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<sup>11</sup> Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound is a nonprofit school improvement and teacher development organization with a national network of 136 schools. It boasts a research-based design built around learning expeditions, other active forms of teaching and learning and a challenging and supportive school culture. Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound’s web site is [www.elob.org](http://www.elob.org).

## **RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Recommendation:**

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for renewal of the Tapestry Charter School and renew the charter of Tapestry Charter School for a period of five years with authority to provide instruction to students in grades Kindergarten through eight with a maximum enrollment of 216 for the period that the renewal charter is in effect during the 2005-06 school year, and thereafter to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through 12, by expanding one grade in each successive year until reaching grade 12 in 2009-10 with a maximum enrollment of 504 students.

### **Summary Discussion**

Tapestry Charter School is located in Buffalo and currently provides instruction to 216 students in grades Kindergarten through eight. The school has applied to the State University Board of Trustees for a full-term charter of five years, pursuant to which it would grow by one grade in each successive year ultimately to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through 12.

In order for the Charter Schools Institute to recommend that a charter school authorized by the State University Board of Trustees be awarded a five-year renewal of its charter, a school must show that it has met its Accountability Plan measures and goals or at least made consistent and meaningful progress towards meeting those outcome measures and goals. It must also demonstrate that it is, at the time of renewal, a fiscally and organizationally sound entity and meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law. In addition, by law, the Charter Schools Institute must find that the school has demonstrated the ability to operate during the next charter period in an educationally and fiscally sound manner and that, if approved, the school would materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act.

Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, the Institute has determined that Tapestry has met the standard for a full-term renewal of five years and recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the school's application for such renewal and authorize renewal of the charter.

During the initial renewal period, Tapestry exceeded all but one of its goals on key outcome measures in academic performance it set for itself in its Accountability Plan. Of particular note in its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, Tapestry has met the goal of its Accountability Plan outcome measure each year that it was applicable. In 2005, half the fourth graders who took the ELA exam scored at the advanced level (Level 4), a notable accomplishment; moreover, *all* fourth graders scored at proficiency (Levels 3 & 4) on the math exam and all but one student scored at proficiency on the most recently available science exam. Since its second year of operation, Tapestry has consistently outperformed the district on these exams by at least 30 percent. The school is also in good standing under No

Child Left Behind. As a whole, the student achievement data the school has amassed during its first four years of operation indicate that the school has significantly improved student learning and achievement.

At the time of the renewal visit in spring 2005, the school had effective systems and programs in place that provide a basis for concluding (together with the outcome data noted above) that the school would, if approved for renewal, likely continue to improve student learning and achievement.

The school continues to benefit from the strong leadership and vision of its founder and school leader. The varied background of members of the Board of Trustees brings a range of competencies, which should continue to serve the school well in general operational planning. The board has recently developed greater expertise in academic issues, which will enable the board to assume more active oversight of the academic program. The school has a clear sense that the knowledge and skills required for academic success include the ability to think analytically and creatively, being able to solve problems and work collaboratively. The school's curriculum is organized in a manner consistent with the school's use of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB), emphasizing active learning and teaching and combining courses of study in different content areas. This experience would likely enable the school to incorporate the ELOB approach into its planned high school program.

In its application for charter renewal, Tapestry Charter School requested approval of a five-year charter and allowing the school to begin operating a high school program, by serving a maximum of 504 students in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Given the school's track record in the first four years of its charter, the strength of the initial high school plans, the continuity in school leadership, the identification of an experienced and competent high school leader, the active working relationship between ELOB and the school, and the support of the Gates Foundation, the Institute recommends, based on the school's student assessment outcomes, the Institute's review of the program during its renewal inspection (including review of the school's fiscal and operational systems) and the plans that the school has submitted as part of its renewal application, that the school be authorized to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through 12 by expanding one grade in each successive year beginning in the 2006-07 school year until reaching grade 12 in 2009-10 with a maximum enrollment of 504 students. As such, the school would be approved to expand from its current Kindergarten through eighth grade configuration to provide instruction in grades nine through 12.

The Institute finds that the school would be operated in an educationally and fiscally sound manner during the renewal charter period, would be likely to improve student learning and achievement, meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and would materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Is the School an Academic Success?**

*Finding 1: As measured by standardized test scores, Tapestry Charter School has posted consistently impressive academic results on New York State fourth grade mathematics and English language arts (ELA) assessments. Results from the school's nationally normed standardized tests (Terra Nova) are evidence of a strong academic program insofar as each tested grade has in almost every instance each year scored above, many substantially above, grade level. Tapestry has met all but one of its key outcome measures in ELA and mathematics.*

*Finding 2: Over the life of the school's charter, Tapestry Charter School's instructional program is characterized by consistently strong classroom instruction, instructional leadership and student work products that meet the demands of state standards.*

*Finding 3: Students and adults at Tapestry Charter School embody the school's mission. Compassion, collaboration, community and creativity are manifest throughout the school.*

Over the life of its charter, Tapestry met all but one of its goals on the key outcome measures in ELA and mathematics. Tapestry has exceeded its goals in mathematics on both the State fourth grade assessment and on the Terra Nova assessment and has met two of three goals in ELA. While Tapestry has met its absolute measure of performance on the state's fourth grade ELA exam and has far outperformed the Buffalo City District on the state exam, it has not met its value-added measure on the Terra Nova reading sub-test.

Tapestry Charter School has successfully utilized the internal evaluation of student work products and standardized test scores to assess the progress of students toward meeting the demands of the New York State Performance Standards. The school's success in consistently scoring well on New York State fourth grade assessments is an indication that the school's leadership and teaching staff successfully assess student progress and implement instructional strategies based on that progress.

The school continues to assess student progress effectively. In addition to analyzing student performance on New York State assessments and the Terra Nova test, the school maintains its Work Sampling System, enabling the administration and teaches to monitor students' ongoing

progress. Individual classroom teachers use effective, and at times exemplary, methods to analyze student work products.

The school's posted successes on standardized measures as well as evaluations from visitors over the life of the charter suggest the curriculum adequately prepares students to acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by the New York State Performance Standards.

The school's curriculum is organized in a manner consistent with the school's use of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). It emphasizes active learning and teaching which combines courses of study in different content areas (for example, creating an interdisciplinary study in the core areas of English language arts, science, and the performing arts). The practice of active learning and linking knowledge in one content area to knowledge in another content area is followed by teachers throughout the school.

Tapestry Charter School's founder continues in her role of instructional leader as the school approaches charter renewal. She has created an administrative team that works with her to guide instructional progress at the school. As evidenced by Tapestry Charter School's consistent success on preparing students to meet and exceed the demands of New York State Standards, the school leadership enables Tapestry to attain its mission and meet its academic goals.

A review of student work across the school provides clear evidence of a robust instructional program that requires students to combine knowledge gained from a variety of sources in creating products that align with the demands of state standards. The strength of curricular and instructional demands for student achievement was ever-present in Kindergarten through grade six. The school's seventh grade instructional program, while clearly linked to the demands of state standards, has yet to rise to the consistent level of rigor demonstrated in earlier grades.

Throughout the term of Tapestry's charter, Institute visitors have noted that students are respectful and cooperative and regularly engaged in academically focused activities.

## **2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?**

*Finding 1: The school's board of trustees benefits from the continued support of many of its founding board members. The board's focus on adding new members with expertise that responds to the needs of the school would serve it well in a future charter. Recently added members hold the*

*potential for the board to engage in independent academic oversight of the school.*

*Finding 2: Parent and student satisfaction at Tapestry Charter School is evidenced by strong results from parent surveys, an extensive waiting list, and strong parent participation in the school community. Tapestry Charter School students report that the school is a safe and supportive learning environment.*

*Finding 3: With exceptions in the area of employee criminal background check and SAVE Plan compliance, and minor exceptions regarding Freedom of Information Law compliance and Code of Ethics distribution, the school's policies and procedures, other internal controls, board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by board members and school personnel, demonstrate the school's general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law, its bylaws and the provisions of its charter.*

In the fourth year of its charter, Tapestry's Board of Trustees has assumed a more independent oversight role, evaluating the school's academic performance using both qualitative and quantitative measures. As standardized measures become available, the board reviews student performance against the school's past accomplishments and gauges progress toward the goals included in its Accountability Plan. The Tapestry Charter School Board of Trustees evaluates the school director on an annual basis, reviewing her educational, organizational and financial leadership. The board establishes annual goals for the school and links the leader's performance review to those goals.

Tapestry's small class size and focus on the integration of the arts into the general curriculum has made it an attractive educational alternative for many parents in Buffalo. The school is fully enrolled with a waiting list at each grade level. Parent surveys conducted over the life of the school's charter show parents are satisfied with the school's academic program. Parents are frequent volunteers at the school and find the school staff responsive to parent feedback, suggestions, and comments about the overall operations of the school.



### **3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?**

*Finding 1: Tapestry Charter School's board of trustees has provided effective fiscal oversight during the term of its first charter.*

*Finding 2: Throughout the life of its charter, the school has consistently and in a timely fashion met its financial reporting requirements and maintained appropriate internal controls.*

*Finding 3: The school is in stable financial condition. It is solvent and has maintained adequate cash flow.*

The Board has provided effective financial oversight and has posted evidence of making decisions that further the school's mission, program, and goals. The school operates pursuant to a long-range fiscal plan and has produced realistic budgets over the term of the charter.

The school has complied with financial reporting requirements and submitted annual financial statement audit reports with unqualified opinions indicating that the school's financial statements fairly represent its financial position, change in net assets and cash flows in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.

The school is a viable entity from a purely financial perspective. The school completed FY 2004 in stable financial condition. The school's total net assets increased by \$42,111 and it finished with total net assets of \$318,417 (\$2,902 per approved enrolled student).

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

*Finding 1: The school leadership, including the demonstrated performance of the heads of school, as well as the commitment and expertise of the respective board members, indicate that Tapestry has the capacity to expand into a high school.*

*Finding 2: The evidence of academic success and the quality of instruction observed during the term of the school's first charter indicate the capacity to expand the current school to include a high school component.*

*Finding 3: The school has established promising partnerships to gird its work in developing a high school. In addition to receiving funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Tapestry is working with Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound and Canisius College to*

*develop the high school program and to play an active role in its implementation.*

*Finding 4: The school's academic plan for growing to serve a high school in the term of a future charter is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.*

*Finding 5: The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter, although it faces the challenge of finding additional space for its expansion.*

Tapestry Charter School was selected by ELOB and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to be one of 20 small high schools implementing the ELOB model. The Gates Foundation will provide support to ELOB on behalf of Tapestry Charter School by funding professional development and instructional leadership as the school implements ELOB in the high school. The support includes a full-time instructional guide to assist high school teachers in designing and delivering curriculum.

The school's administrative structure will include an executive director, a head of the K-8 school, and a principal of the high school, grades 9-12. The school's founder and current instructional leader will serve as the executive director in charge of the academic and organizational success of Tapestry Charter School grades K-12. This individual's success in leading Tapestry Charter School in the term of its current charter provides confidence that the proposed growth to include a high school will succeed.

Evidence produced during the term of Tapestry Charter School's first charter shows that the school has been successful at preparing students to meet or exceed the demands of New York State Performance Standards as measured by nationally normed standardized assessments as well as New York State assessments. All required courses for students to attain a Regents or Regents Plus diploma are included in the school's academic plan. Tapestry High School's core academic program will be a standard college preparatory program. The school has established a partnership with Canisius College that will allow students access to college level coursework and will permit enrichment and acceleration opportunities for students who meet expectations ahead of schedule.

The school's fiscal plan is based on many conservative assumptions and should provide a useable framework for the term of a new charter. The school's current space, which it leases from a private developer, is sufficient to accommodate its K-8 program. The proposed high school expansion will need to be housed at a separate facility. The school's

need for additional space does present a challenge, although it has a year to finalize its plans and had at the time of the renewal visit identified several options that it may pursue.

The school is in a stable financial position. It has improved its financial position in each of its first three years. A modest decline in net assets is projected for its fourth year (not yet audited) and the budget for the school's fifth year also projects a modest increase.

The Institute finds that the school's financial position during the term of a future charter should continue to be stable assuming the continued demand for enrollment in the school.

## RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	<b>Renewal Question 1</b> <b>Is the School an Academic Success?</b>	
<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.

### *Academic Attainment & Improvement*

As measured by standardized test scores, Tapestry Charter School has posted consistently impressive academic results on New York State fourth grade mathematics and English language arts (ELA) assessments. Results from the school's nationally normed standardized tests (Terra Nova) are evidence of a strong academic program insofar as each tested grade has in almost every instance each year scored above, many substantially above, grade level. Tapestry has met all but one of its key outcome measures in ELA and mathematics.

Over the life of its charter, Tapestry met all but one of its goals on the key outcome measures in ELA and mathematics. Tapestry has exceeded its goals in mathematics on both the State fourth grade assessment and on the Terra Nova assessment and has met two of three goals in ELA. While Tapestry has met its absolute measure of performance on the state's fourth grade ELA exam and has far outperformed the

Buffalo City District on the state exam, it has not met its value-added measure on the Terra Nova reading sub-test.

In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, Tapestry met the goal of its Accountability Plan outcome measure each year that it was applicable. In 2005, half the fourth graders who took the ELA exam scored at the advanced level (Level 4), a notable accomplishment; moreover, all fourth graders scored at proficiency (Levels 3 and 4) on the math exam and all but one student scored at proficiency on the science exam.

In its comparative level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, Tapestry has far outperformed the Buffalo City School District in ELA and math during each of its four years of operation.

Results have been mixed on the value-added to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the Terra Nova Test. Given the high scores on the Terra Nova, with most cohorts scoring substantially above grade level, Tapestry has not shown sufficient gains, as called for in its value-added measure, on the Terra Nova reading test.<sup>12</sup> In the last two years, the average scaled score of each cohort from spring to spring has shown only minimal increases.<sup>13</sup> In Total Math, the average score of each cohort from spring to spring showed sufficient increases in 2003-04 to meet the goal of the outcome measure; in 2004-05, two of the four cohorts registered sufficient increases to meet the goal of the outcome measure.

The State Education Department has deemed Tapestry to be a *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years under the NCLB requirements.

In addition to presenting data on these outcome measures, the Tapestry Accountability Plan includes outcome measures on the percent of students demonstrating a year's growth as measured by components of the Language and Literacy, Mathematical Thinking, Scientific Thinking and Social Studies Domains on a Work Sampling Checklist. While the school reports that students met the goal stated in the outcome measure in all years, the reliability of the scoring could not be determined.

Tapestry includes an outcome measure in its Accountability Plan to demonstrate the effectiveness of its early intervention for at risk students, calling for students with a low score on the Brigance Early Screening Inventory prior to kindergarten entry to score within the ready-for-literacy range upon retest within the first month of grade one. While the objective has been met, the small number of cases suggests that the Brigance may not be useful for the school's entering kindergartners.

On a writing sample administered each spring, Tapestry students score within the proficient range using a rubric that is rated by the classroom teacher and one other teacher. Students are reported to have met the goal in all years; however, the criteria used to score the writing samples were not included in the renewal application and the scoring procedures are not explained.

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<sup>12</sup> The school's value-added outcome measures are stated as year-to-year gains in scaled scores. Since a scaled score is a quantitative representation of an absolute level of skill and knowledge, students are expected to show substantial gains each year, simply by virtue of acquiring the additional skill and knowledge of one more year of schooling. A small scaled score increase suggests that a student has not acquired the expected additional amount of skills and knowledge from one-year's test administration to the next.

<sup>13</sup> When expressed as NCE scores, both cohorts with scores showed a decline in NCEs in 2003-04 and one of the four showed a slight increase in NCEs in 2004-05.

### *Accountability Plan Outcome Measures*

In its Accountability Plan, Tapestry Charter School set outcome measures to demonstrate its academic success in the key subjects of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. The outcome measures include the following three required types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the value-added to student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of student cohort performance on a school-selected standardized test. The following tables indicate the specific outcomes Tapestry set for itself accompanied by its annual results.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to being held to these accountability measures, Tapestry is expected, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to make adequate yearly progress toward enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and math examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues a school accountability report. Tapestry's accountability status in the most recent report is indicated below.

Besides the three required outcome measures, and the NCLB outcome measure, the school may also have included additional self-selected academic outcome measures as part of its Accountability Plan. These various outcome measures constitute the renewal benchmarks for academic attainment and improvement.

### *Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations*

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
ELA	Using the New York ELA Grade 4 Test, <b>75%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students who have attended Tapestry Charter School for at least two years (tested within their second year) will score a three and above.	4	<b>50%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>94%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>87%</b>
Math	Using the New York grade 4 Math Exam, <b>75%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students who have attended Tapestry Charter School for at least two years (tested within their second year), will score a three or above..	4	<b>53%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>94%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>100%</b> <sup>1</sup>
Science	Using the New York State Grade 4 Science Exam, <b>75%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students who have attended Tapestry Charter School for at least two years (tested within the second year), will score a three and above. <sup>2</sup>	4	N/A	<b>88%</b>	<b>96%</b>	N/A
Social Studies	Using the New York State Grade 5 Social Studies Exam, <b>75%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students who have attended Tapestry Charter School for at least two years (tested within the second year) will score a three and above.	5	No students in grade	<b>80%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>88%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Results are for all tested students irrespective of time enrolled.

<sup>2</sup> Results on the science exam in 2001-02 and 2002-03 represent the proportion of students answering a pre-determined number of questions correctly (i.e., the state designated level).

<sup>14</sup> As 2001-02 was the school's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year.

*Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations*

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
ELA	Using the New York ELA Grade 4 Test, Tapestry Charter School students, will <b>outperform</b> students from schools within the <b>Buffalo Public School District</b> over the life of the charter.	4	Tapestry	50	90	71	83
			Buffalo District	34	34	34	39
Math	Using the New York grade 4 Math Exam, Tapestry Charter School students will <b>outperform</b> students from schools within the <b>Buffalo School District</b> over the life of the charter	4	Tapestry	53	95	96	100
			Buffalo District	45	58	62	N/A

*Value-Added to Student Learning According to Spring-to-Spring Cohort Gains*

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year			
			2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Reading	Using the Terra Nova and Fourth Grade New York State English Language Arts Assessment, cohorts of Tapestry Charter School students in grades 2 through 6 will show an average gain of at least <b>14</b> scaled score <b>points</b> over their previous year's scores.	3	N/A	20	11	9
		4		--	--	10
		5		--	--	--
		6		--	5	0
		7				9
Math	Using the Terra Nova and Grade 4 New York State Math Assessment, cohorts of Tapestry Charter School students in grades 2 through 6, will show an average gain of at least <b>14</b> scaled score <b>points</b> over their previous year's score.	3	N/A	53	35	47
		4		--	--	13
		5		--	--	--
		6			20	29
		7				5

*Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB*

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states Tapestry's 2004-05 School Accountability Status: *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years.

*Student Achievement According to Unique Academic Measures*

Accountability Plan		Results	
Subjects	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Years 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04
ELA	Using the Work Sampling Checklist, <b>80%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students will meet yearly grade level expectations for the speaking, writing and spelling components of the Language and Literacy Domain.	All	Students met expectations on the Checklist for Language and Literacy in all years.
	Using the Brigance Early Screening Inventory, <b>90%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students achieving below cutoff score of 80 prior to kindergarten entry will score within the ready-for-literacy range (90-100) upon retest within the first month of grade one.	K	Objective has been met, but the small number of cases suggests that the Brigance may not be useful for the school's entering kindergartners.
	On a writing sample administered each spring, <b>75%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students will score within the proficient range using a rubric that is rated by the classroom teacher and one other teacher.	All	Students met expectations on the writing samples in all years. The criteria used to score the samples were not included in the renewal application; the scoring procedures are not explained.
Math	Using the Work Sampling Checklist, <b>80%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students will demonstrate one full year of growth as measured by the <i>mathematical processes, numbers and operations, patterns, relationships and functions, geometry and spatial relations, measurement, and data collection and probability</i> components of the Mathematical Thinking Domain.	All	Students met expectations on the Checklist for Mathematical Thinking in all years.
Science	Using the Work Sampling Checklist, <b>80%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students will meet yearly grade level expectations for the Scientific Thinking Domain.	All	Students met expectations on the Checklist for Scientific Thinking in all years
Social Studies	Using the Work Sampling Checklist, <b>80%</b> of Tapestry Charter School students will meet yearly grade level expectations for the people, past and present, human interdependence, citizenship, and government, and people and where they live components of the Social Studies Domain.	All	Students met expectations on the Checklist for Social Studies Thinking in all years



<p><b>Benchmark 1B</b></p> <p><b>Use of Assessment Data</b></p>	<p><b>1B</b></p> <p><b>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></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 knowledge and skills.</p>
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Over the life of its charter, Tapestry Charter School has successfully utilized the internal evaluation of student work products and standardized test scores to assess the progress of students toward meeting the demands of the New York State Performance Standards. The school's success in consistently scoring well on New York State fourth grade assessments is an indication that the school's leadership and teaching staff successfully assess student progress and implement instructional strategies based on that progress.

As noted in the school's third year inspection report, "Tapestry does a good job of collecting and analyzing student demographic and performance data. The Work Sampling System, an ongoing classroom performance assessment system used to document students' skills, knowledge, behavior, and achievements across the content areas, is administered three times during the year." This system is designed to give parents and teachers information regarding individual student progress toward goals. Also noted in the third year report, the school has a strong record of using data to make decisions that impact instruction in classrooms. For example, teachers use student performance to determine groupings for math, ELA, and science instruction in the 5/6-grade cluster.

Observations, interviews, and analyses of student work at Tapestry during the renewal visit revealed that the school continues to assess student progress effectively. In addition to analyzing student performance on New York State assessments and the Terra Nova test, the school maintains its Work Sampling System, enabling the administration and teachers to monitor students' ongoing progress. Individual classroom teachers use effective, and at times exemplary, methods to analyze student work products.

In one 5/6 grade class, students maintained a readers' and writers' notebooks throughout the year. The readers' notebooks contain well written and thoughtful dialogue between teacher and student regarding the various pieces of literature students had read throughout the school year. The teacher assigns a specific number of books from each genre (literary fiction, non-fiction, historical fiction, mythology and folklore, drama, etc.) that students must read and checks on student selections to ensure that they provide the appropriate level of challenge and enjoyment. Students write about various literary techniques exemplified in each book, make connections to other literary works, courses of study, and life experiences. The teacher and the school's principal create regular, substantive and thoughtful responses to each child's entries.

Besides using teacher-prepared tests, the teachers make use of Terra Nova prep materials by administering practice tests to students, scoring them, and then conducting an item analysis to determine the continuing academic needs of students. Teachers construct additional class lessons or individual instructional opportunities to ensure student progress in each area of need.

Student writing is assessed using an amalgam of commercially created rubrics. In addition, students in the upper grades read and provide substantive feedback to their peers on many writing tasks.

The school uses narrative reports to provide parents with thoughtful and specific information as to their child's progress. These reports are detailed and include a report of students' progress and accomplishments during the marking period, as well as traditional letter grades. Significant to her role as the school's instructional leader, the school's principal reads every narrative of every student in the school prior to the reports being released. This review provides her with an indication of both student progress and teacher skill in assessing and communicating to parents.

The school strengthens its internal assessment practices by ensuring rubrics are well aligned and scoring student work samples across various grades, i.e. having fourth, sixth and seventh grade teachers score the same set of sixth grade student work to reinforce the alignment of teacher evaluations of individual pieces of student work.

<p><b>Benchmark 1C</b></p> <p><b>Curriculum</b></p>	<p><b>1C</b></p> <p><b>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance standards.</b></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>
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Tapestry Charter School uses the New York State curriculum guidelines for all grade levels. Early in the school's charter, a standardized format for lessons was created with direct links to New York State Performance Standards. Teachers have freedom to adapt the curriculum guidelines in order to address the needs and interests of students. Over the life of the school's charter, visitors have noted a broad range of curriculum materials, instructional strategies, and supplemental materials in classrooms. The school's posted successes on standardized measures as well as evaluations from visitors over the life of the charter suggest the curriculum adequately prepares students to acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by the New York State Performance Standards.

In English language arts, the humanities and the arts the school's curriculum follows state demands but as implemented allows teachers autonomous choices as to how subject matter and skills are delivered in the classroom. The school uses a more traditional approach in mathematics using a combination of the Scott Foresman and Everyday Mathematics math series in Kindergarten through fourth grades and Holt Reinhart mathematics in grades five through seven.

The school's curriculum is organized in a manner consistent with the school's use of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). It emphasizes active learning and teaching which combines courses of study in different content areas (for example, creating an interdisciplinary study in the core areas of English language arts, science, and the performing arts). The practice of active learning and linking knowledge in one content area to knowledge in another content area is followed by teachers throughout the school.

Renewal visitors commented that the school has a clear sense that the knowledge and skills required for academic success include the ability to think analytically and creatively, being able to solve problems and work collaboratively. Students have a well-developed knowledge of science and history facts.

<b>Benchmark 1D</b>  <b>Pedagogy</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>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>

Tapestry Charter School's founder continues in her role of instructional leader as the school approaches charter renewal. She has created an administrative team that works with her to guide instructional progress at the school. The administrative team includes the school's assistant principal, a staff member with extensive experience in curriculum, instruction, and special education, as well as a staff member with extensive success in connecting the performing and visual arts to core curricular areas. As evidenced by Tapestry Charter School's consistent success on preparing students to meet and exceed the demands of New York State Standards (detailed in Benchmark 1A), strong instructional leadership enables the school to attain its mission and meet its academic goals.

Throughout the term of Tapestry's current charter, Charter School Institute visitors have noted the high quality of instruction and expectation for student success evident in all classrooms. Classroom observations made during the renewal visit reveal the

school continues to deliver instruction that is effective and that ensures significant numbers of students meet and exceed the demands of state standards.

One fifth/sixth grade classroom has established a weather station on the lawn of a nearby church. Throughout the year students monitor the sophisticated weather equipment included in the station, noting barometric pressure, wind speed, local observed conditions and the like. The students record the information then return to the classroom to compare their readings with local weather information accessed via one of 20 wireless laptop computers available for student use at all times.

A fourth grade study of the Erie Canal includes using a variety of literature and primary source documents to develop an understanding of the canal's critical role in economic development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to researching and writing about the history of the canal and its benefit to the people of New York and North America, students engage in mathematics and musical activities that link to what they are studying.

In seventh grade, students engaged in an extensive study of the Civil War again using literature, history texts, the Internet and primary source documents to learn the facts of the War Between the States as well as to link their study to a development of student writing skills.

In a study of ancient Greece and art history, second and third grade students read literature, history and studied maps of ancient Greece. In addition to writing about the customs and habits of the Greeks, students studied the art, theatre, and clothing styles and created artifacts using the same methods employed in ancient times.

The school's curriculum includes a robust offering of the performing and visual arts that is frequently woven into core instructional areas. For example, in third and fourth grade English language arts poetry studies, students read a variety of descriptive poems and traveled to the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. Students spent time studying a variety of paintings that were interpreted by Gallery staff. Students then chose a painting, wrote a poem describing the painting and then re-created their chosen painting. Students' poetry pieces were edited and put into final form and digital images of their artwork were taken. Teachers and students worked together to publish the collection and distribute it to the gallery, their parents, and community members. The school continues to explore opportunities to increase the connections between core content areas and the arts without diminishing the high expectations for student work that has characterized Tapestry during the term of its first charter.

As noted in the school description, instruction is delivered in multiage classes in Kindergarten through third grade and in fifth and sixth grade. Fourth graders receive instruction with their age and grade peers as New York State Assessments in English language arts and mathematics fall in the fourth grade. In the 2004-05 school year, seventh grade was the highest grade served by the school and therefore was constructed as a stand alone grade. In future years, upper grade instruction will be divided into classrooms consisting of fifth and sixth graders and classrooms containing seventh and eighth graders.

A review of student work across the school provides clear evidence of a robust instructional program that requires students to combine knowledge gained from a variety of sources in creating products that align with the demands of state standards. The strength of curricular and instructional demands for student achievement was ever-present in Kindergarten through grade six. The school's seventh grade instructional program, while clearly linked to the demands of state standards, has yet to rise to the consistent level of rigor demonstrated in earlier grades.

The school contracts with the Buffalo Public Schools for a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and a consultant for the hearing-impaired to work with students who are in need of these services. Tapestry hired a special education teacher to work with students with disabilities as required by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). A review of the special education program conducted during the renewal visit found that the school is generally in compliance with all special education rules and regulations.

The school has a Special Education program that functions well and serves the needs of its students. The Special Education Coordinator is a licensed School Psychologist and performs counseling for special education students as well as others, including anti-violence and divorce/separation counseling. A Child Study Team is in place at the school and also serves as the 504 team. The school does testing at the early grade levels to identify students who may have disabilities, and almost always tries in-house support structures before referring students to the Committee on Special Education (CSE). The school appears to have a good relationship with the district CSE. The speech therapist, physical and occupational therapists and teachers for students with hearing disabilities are all from the Buffalo City School District with no outside consultants being paid. The school has complained to the district about special service providers. When providers have been found to be ineffective, the school has had them replaced. At the time of the renewal visit, 12 students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in place, and there were very few students with test modifications. Currently, the school has no students who are English language learners.

Upon the recommendation of the Special Education Coordinator, the board has made changes to some of its Special Education procedures. The coordinator keeps computer records regarding students with IEPs and has developed a PowerPoint presentation for staff on how to read an IEP. IEPs are personally handed to teachers to provide an opportunity for questions. Documents reviewed on a sampling basis during the site visit included IEPs, a Chapter 408 form (local), progress reports and parent notifications, which all appeared to be in order. The school reports that there have been no problems with special education billing with the districts of students' residence, which is aided by computer tracking of special services.

**Benchmark 1E**  
**Teaching Staff**

**1E**

**The school's instructional staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.**

A school that meets this benchmark will be able to demonstrate that teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success. (While handled under the benchmark for legal and charter compliance, it is important to note that a school must also be able to demonstrate that teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under both federal and state law with few exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with this requirement of law, the school should be able to show that it has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures.)

Throughout the life of Tapestry's charter, Institute reports reveal the school has consistently maintained a teaching staff that demonstrates strong competence in their assigned positions. Teachers work across the school to improve their professional practice by assisting each other with curriculum planning and by sharing content materials and instructional strategies. As noted in the school's second end of year report, "Most impressive were teachers' attention to countless instructional details that cumulatively teach and reinforce learning for all students... Teachers use assessment information about students' progress to plan instruction, create fluid groups of students based on instructional needs, and ensure that new concepts and skills are presented in a way that builds upon prior learning." This robust and effective professionalism continues to be the hallmark of Tapestry's teaching staff. Creative student work products that exemplify the ideals of New York State Performance Standards and the school's success in posting high marks on standardized assessments demonstrate that Tapestry's teachers are competent and consistently use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.

<p><b>Benchmark 1F</b></p> <p><b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b></p>	<p><b>1F</b></p> <p><b>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</b></p> <p>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.</p>
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Discipline policies are distributed to each student in September in the Family Handbook and are strictly enforced. There have been no out-of-school suspensions in four years.

The school uses *The Responsive Classroom* approach to teaching, which emphasizes, among other things, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Teachers utilize these skills in interaction with each other, children and parents. Design elements of *Expeditionary Learning* support the discipline model.

The school's Code of Conduct, *The Fabric of Tapestry*, is displayed in classrooms and common areas. Options for addressing ongoing behavior problems include: instruction at the classroom level by the teacher or school psychologist, referral to peer mediators or the school psychologist, and development of a behavior modification plan in consultation with the teacher, school psychologist, students and parents or guardians.

Throughout the term of Tapestry's charter, Institute visitors have noted that students are respectful and cooperative and regularly engaged in academically focused activities.



<p><b>Benchmark 1G</b></p> <p><b>Professional Development</b></p>	<p><b>1G.1</b></p>	<p><b>The school's professional development program aligns with the school's mission, assists teachers in meeting students' academic needs and school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning and/or teacher content knowledge.</b></p> <p>Professional development offerings at a school that meets this benchmark are aligned with the school's educational philosophy and are effective in helping teachers improve instruction. Most importantly, professional development practices at the school are a priority of the school leadership and buttress the instructional program, meet student learning needs and result in increased student achievement. The school's calendar reflects that professional development and instructional planning are a high priority. A school should also be able to demonstrate that necessary support for inexperienced teachers is available. Teachers and school leaders report professional development activities have resulted in gains in teacher pedagogic content, knowledge, and skills and this expertise has led to increased student academic achievement.</p>
	<p><b>1G.2</b></p>	<p><b>The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement that supports the school's ability to reach the goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has leaders who spend extended time in classrooms. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel, support, and opportunities to increase the instructional skills and content knowledge required for the school to meet its academic goals.</p>

Professional development activities at Tapestry are a key component in attracting and maintaining the school's high quality instructional staff. The school provides summer professional development days to the entire staff and a range of 11-20 professional development opportunities throughout the school year. One staff meeting a month addresses a specific professional development topic. In the 2004-05 school year, the school held one full-day off-site staff development session that it found successful and therefore anticipates repeating this practice in future years.

Due to the school's strong emphasis on students' literacy development, Tapestry teachers are encouraged to attend conferences on early literacy strategies. Many teachers have attended conferences on Guided Reading and Writing and on the Lucy Caulkins methodology of teaching literacy.

According to the school's renewal application, the school director and pupil personnel director hold scheduled observations four times each school year. They evaluate the physical and emotional environment, the level of challenge in activities, engagement of students, and teacher delivery of instruction. At the teacher's next free period, the observations as well as the teacher's progress on formal professional development goals are discussed. Observations are written up and become a part of the teacher's personnel file.

The director holds formal reviews near the end of the school year. The discussion includes successes and challenges of the school year, evaluation of the teachers' contribution to the whole school community, and ability in the classroom. The teacher then develops his or her professional goals, which are then evaluated during the course of the following school year.

## Renewal Question 2

### Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

<b>Benchmark 2A</b>  <b>School Specific Non-Academic Goals</b>	<b>2A</b>  <b>The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.</b>
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Tapestry Charter School's Specific Non-Academic Goals are as follows:

**Goal:** Tapestry Charter School will provide an interdisciplinary academic program that incorporates the arts and social responsibility into the student's daily academic life.

**Measure 1:** A majority of Tapestry Charter School students will be able to connect social and cultural awareness to academic learning as determined through teacher documentation.

**Results:** Measure met through books with social development objectives, writing portfolios, education plays presented by students, performances about artists representing ethnic groups, dance, community projects, and opportunities for student reflection on these activities.

**Measure 2:** When observed by independent individuals and experts who visit the school throughout the year, 75% will say that students are "often" or "always" engaged in learning and are respectful of each other and their school environment as determined by a checklist.

**Results:** the school has not collected data to support this measure. Anecdotal evidence has shown that visitors are uniformly impressed with the atmosphere of the school.

Each day begins with a 30 minute "class meeting," which is "a forum for students and teacher to gather as a class to reflect, discuss issues, or make decisions about ways they want their class to be. The students' role in these meetings is to participate as valuable and valued contributors to the classroom community." The school characterizes the class meetings as a "valuable classroom management tool – one that helps students actively contribute to their academic and social learning."

According to the Third Year Report, Tapestry has achieved its goal "to provide an interdisciplinary academic program that incorporates the arts and social responsibility into the students' daily academic life" by integrating the Super Subjects (Art, Physical Education, Music, Drama, Dance and Spanish) into students' daily schedules and is implementing Responsive Classroom behavioral strategies throughout the school.

Students at Tapestry are exposed to the arts on a daily basis not only through their participation in the Super Subjects, but in their content area classes as well. Classroom teachers make the effort to integrate, whenever possible, the arts into their

curriculum. The school's commitment to the arts is evident in hallways and classrooms throughout the school.

According to the school leader, Tapestry has engaged in a number of projects to further support the integration of the arts into students' lives. Tapestry has developed a partnership with the Albright-Knox Art Gallery through the School in a Museum Program to develop students' English language arts skills by creating opportunities for them to respond to a variety of art works in the museum's collection. This year third graders at Tapestry participated in the program and completed assignments based on this year's theme "Conversations."

Students in grades 5/6 participated in a dance history unit that infused the social studies and arts/dance curricula. Students learned about the *Amistad* and visited the ship when it was on view in Buffalo, and learned about a dance composition entitled "Rainbow Round My Shoulder" and attended a dance performance by students from the Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts.

<p><b>Benchmark 2B</b></p> <p><b>Mission &amp; Design Elements</b></p>	<p><b>2B</b></p> <p><b>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has school Board members, parents, teachers, school leader(s) and community partners that consistently present evidence of the school's success with reference to the school's mission and the key design elements included in its charter application. Key elements of the school's design are well implemented and the school's academic results, governance, and instructional practices reflect the mission of the school.</p>
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The academic and programmatic design at Tapestry is based on the principles of the Developmental Studies Center (DSC), a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, California and Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, a comprehensive school reform design. The school's focus on students' literacy development and creating a "caring community of learners" are aligned with the mission of both organizations. The school uses the implementation of the Responsive Classroom to make the philosophical views of the Developmental Studies Center a reality throughout the school.

The school focuses on six key areas:

- Literature based reading and language arts, integrating social and ethical lessons into academic curriculum.
- Mathematics, focusing on building students' "number sense" and collaboration skills.
- Collaborative classroom learning, helping children work with others in a fair, caring and responsible way.
- Classroom management and discipline, emphasizing problem solving and responsibility rather than rewards and punishments.
- Parent/family involvement, engaging families in learning activities at home and at school.
- School wide activities for adults and children, promoting inclusion, non-competitiveness and helpfulness.

As noted by inspectors in Tapestry's Third Year Report, the school's mission is very clear to the majority of stakeholders who are able to articulate its key components.

In conversations and interviews, parents, students, teachers, Board members, and administrators talk enthusiastically about the school's mission to create a small learning community that infuses the arts to help students achieve academic success. They all describe the supportive environment that the school provides for students, families, and staff. The school's board is articulate in advocating for the school and maintain that the school's mission is what makes it special and a feasible alternative to the Buffalo Public School system. Parents asserted that the school has been successful in helping their children love school and that it is preparing them "for life."

<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>

The administrative team at the school consists of the school director, who is the school's instructional leader, associate director, pupil personnel coordinator, administrative assistant, and the arts coordinator, who also serves as the dance instructor. Finally, the school has a seven-member board of trustees responsible for providing fiscal and policy oversight.

Reports over the life of the charter consistently reflect strong instructional and organizational leadership, including an effective relationship between the board and the school administration. This finding is further confirmed by the evidence presented at the renewal visit and in light of the school's success at posting high marks on standardized assessment measures.

The Tapestry Charter School Board of Trustees evaluates the school director on an annual basis, reviewing her educational, organizational and financial leadership. The board establishes annual goals for the school and links the leader's performance review to those goals.

As described in Tapestry's third year inspection report, the board in the early years of the school had used its evaluation of the director to assess the efficacy of the school's

instructional program. According to the report, board members acknowledged that they had not had the capacity to do a more formal assessment of the academic program and so were dependent on the director to inform them about the teaching and learning taking place at the school.

At the time of the renewal visit, the school's board of trustees played a more direct role in evaluating the school's academic performance using both qualitative and quantitative measures. As standardized measures became available, the board reviewed student performance against the school's past accomplishments and gauged progress toward the goals included in its Accountability Plan. As board members are frequently in the school, they visit classrooms, observe instruction, and review student work samples as qualitative anecdotal indicators of how students are progressing toward attaining the established school goals.

With an exception in the area of fingerprinting and background checks (described under benchmark 2.E), the board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them with the following deficiencies noted. While the school has a FOIL policy in its charter, there was no FOIL notice posted in the school, and the policy or notice of its existence was not included in materials for employees or parents. As a result, parents and staff may not know of access to the full range of available records. The policy also has the director of the school serving as both the records access officer and the records appeals officer, which roles should be separated. We also note that the school's FOIL policy must be updated due to recent revisions in the law. The school's Code of Ethics is deficient because it only addresses the conduct of school trustees, rather than trustees, officers and employees as required by subdivision 2851(2)(v) of the Education Law. In addition, the school did not have a policy or procedure in place for distribution of the Code of Ethics to employees. While the school is aware of the requirement to provide alternative instruction to all students when suspended or expelled, and has never had an out-of-school suspension, its student discipline policies do not make clear that alternative instruction will be provided. Lastly, the school's complaint policy does not include any provision for appeals to the Institute or SED in cases involving violations of the Act or law in accordance with Education Law section 2855. We note that the Institute did not receive any official or unofficial complaints regarding the school.

The school has a board manual and members had access to key documents. The school also provides a student/parent manual and a personnel manual.

The board's conflict of interest policy in its Code of Ethics taken together with provisions in the school's bylaws (especially section 2.9 dealing with contracts with the school) adequately discusses and guards against self-dealing transactions. While there has been at least one interested transaction, the board ensured it followed the foregoing procedures and board members confirmed that the interested board member recused himself. The Institute found sufficient evidence that the board has maintained and abided by its bylaws.

<p><b>Benchmark 2D</b></p> <p><b>Parents &amp; Students</b></p>	<p><b>2D</b></p> <p><b>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by survey results as well as the volume of parents who choose the school to provide education for their children and the degree to which parents persist with that choice over the child's academic career.</b></p> <p>The school that satisfies this benchmark will be able to show through generally accepted surveying standards and practices that a large majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school are satisfied with the school. As only a well-informed parent can be meaningfully satisfied, the school must be able to show that it has provided to parents detailed and accurate information about their child's performance as well as the performance of the school as a whole. The school should also be able to provide data on application lottery, enrollment and persistence rates to demonstrate that large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school, and far more importantly, keep their children enrolled year-to-year. Ideal survey data will also provide an explanation for the persistence rate experienced by the school.</p>
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Parent and student satisfaction are included as one of the school's goals as follows:

**Goal 1: Tapestry Charter School will maintain strong parent support through volunteerism and commitment to the school.**

**Measure 1:** 75 percent of Tapestry Charter School parents who respond to the parent survey will be satisfied with the Tapestry Charter School's academic program and their child's academic growth.

**Results:** As measured by parent survey's, the parent satisfaction rate was over 90 percent each year.

**Measure 2:** 75 percent of Tapestry Charter School parents who respond to the parent survey will be satisfied with communication between home and school.

**Results:** This measure was met, exceeding the goal by approximately 20 percent each year as indicated in yearly surveys.

**Measure 3:** 75 percent of Tapestry Charter School parents who respond to the parent survey will be satisfied with their child's social growth.

**Results:** Measure met, exceeding the goal by approximately 20 percent each year.

**Measure 4:** 35 percent of Tapestry families volunteer on an annual basis.

**Results:** Measure met, exceeding the goal by approximately 20 percent each year.

**Measure 5:** The average daily attendance rate at the Tapestry Charter School will exceed the Buffalo Public School's average daily attendance rate by 2 percent, or at least 94 percent attendance.



**Results:** Measure met and exceeded.

**Measure 6:** Tapestry Charter School will maintain 95 percent enrollment with a waitlist equal to or greater than 25 percent of enrollment.

**Results:** Measure met and exceeded.

**Measure 7:** 40 percent of Tapestry Charter School families will participate in Tapestry Charter School Community Association meetings and events.

**Results:** Measure met and exceeded.

As noted in the school's third year report, students and parents at the time of renewal were very satisfied with the school. Students felt safe and that teachers "make learning fun." Parents like the school's emphasis on the integration of the arts into the general curriculum.

Over the life of the charter, students have reported their approval of Tapestry. They believe that teachers "make learning fun" by encouraging them to work at their own pace and that the adults in the school respect them for who they are as individuals. For students, this respect is evident in the fact that teachers answer their questions, offer to help them whenever they are having difficulty with an assignment, and in general, celebrate their successes.

Students also reported feeling safe in the school. They attributed this feeling of safety to the fact that the school provides a lot of adult supervision. They also stated that there are very few fights in the school and that there is an opportunity for students to engage in some kind of mediation during lunch time to resolve any conflict they might have with a peer. One student commented, "There is a lot of kindness here." This reflects the school's commitment to create a caring learning community for students.

Tapestry's small class size and focus on the integration of the arts into the general curriculum has made it an attractive educational alternative for many parents in Buffalo. The school is fully enrolled with a waiting list at each grade level. Parent surveys conducted over the life of the school's charter show parents are satisfied with the school's academic program.

Parents are frequent volunteers at the school and find the school staff responsive to parent feedback, suggestions, and comments about the overall operations of the school.

<b>Benchmark 2E</b>	<b>2E</b>	<b>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</b>
<b>Legal Requirements</b>		A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.

As part of a compliance review, the Institute reviewed New York State Education Department (SED) correspondence with the school. While there were no findings that needed to be addressed in response to SED's Third Year Monitoring Report, SED did note that an insufficient number of teachers were fully certified at the school in March of 2004 (6 out of 14 with 4 pending). During the renewal visit, the Institute found that only 4 of 14 teachers were not certified at least provisionally, which is in compliance with the Charter Schools Act (the Act). As the school was not accepting federal Title money at the time of the renewal visit, its teachers did not have to be "highly qualified" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, but will have to be by the end of the 2005-06 school year. In July of 2004 and January of 2005, SED informed the school that its Safe Schools Against Violence (SAVE) law school safety plan was only in partial compliance with the law and Commissioner of Education regulations. At the time of the renewal visit and a follow-up visit in August, this issue was still unresolved. In fairness to the school, the SED correspondence does not clearly delineate the path to compliance, especially for those SAVE plan components that are in partial compliance.

Employee fingerprinting is the greatest compliance issue facing the school. At the time of the renewal visit and later during a follow-up visit in August, the school had several deficiencies regarding background checks and identifying employees to the school in compliance with the Act. While the school made progress between the two visits, at least ten employees were still in the initial stages of background checks (six had recently been fingerprinted and had submitted OSPRA 101 forms, but had not been cleared; two were about to submit the OSPRA 101 form and prints; and two needed to be printed and needed to submit OSPRA 101 forms [one had been cleared by a different state agency not accepted by the Act] ). The school also had not followed the procedures for emergency conditional clearance of these 10 employees, but was about to initiate this process. Four employees had been cleared but the clearances reflected other schools for a variety of reasons. Thus, the school must submit or re-submit OSPRA 102 forms for each of these employees identifying Tapestry Charter School as the proper employer to comply with the Act. One of the foregoing employees had only received a conditional clearance in September 2002 and there was no further evidence of final clearance by SED. The school had yet to resolve this issue. As a result of the foregoing deficiency, the Institute and the school will enter into a corrective plan to implement the Act's provisions regarding background checks. Adherence to the corrective plan will not be a condition of the school's renewal.

The school has had a mixed to good record of compliance through March 2005 in terms of submission of information to the Institute, which has been characterized by periods of excellent on-time or early submissions interrupted by a few very late submissions as follows. In 2001, the school started off by submitting one item 55 days late and one item 22 days late, and then was never more than four days late to the end of the year. Then, until April of 2002, the school had an excellent record in terms of on-time submissions but subsequently submitted items 87, 180, 26, 67 and 15 days late. From late August 2002 until August 2004, the school again had a very good submission record that was marred by having its annual report and accountability plan progress report both submitted 39 days late and thereafter five other items submitted 1-5 days late through March 2005.

With the exception of a policy or procedure to ensure that all new hires undergo proper background checks, the board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law. As described in benchmark 2.C, exceptions were noted in the areas of Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), Code of Ethics and discipline.

In terms of legal support, the school has several board members who are lawyers and assist in legal matters on a *pro bono* basis. In the one instance when a board member performed legal work for the school on a fee basis, the school followed its own policies for insuring the fee was reasonable and the member involved recused himself from approving the fee. The board has also retained outside counsel for resolution of transportation issues, and other outside counsel for other student issues.

Except as set forth above, the school's policies and procedures, other internal controls, board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by board members and school personnel demonstrate the school's general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law (e.g., I.D.E.A., F.E.R.P.A.), its bylaws and the provisions of its charter.

### **Renewal Question 3**

#### **Is the School Fiscally Sound?**

**Benchmark 3A**  
**Board Oversight**

**3A**

**The Board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school's mission, program and goals.**

The board has generally provided effective financial oversight, ensuring that money is available before approving expenditures. The board does have a finance/audit committee that meets monthly. A review of a sample of board minutes provided evidence that the board has been actively involved with oversight of the school's finances. The treasurer presents a detailed financial report at every board meeting (held monthly) that is reviewed carefully. This report is a key tool for ensuring that the board provides appropriate oversight.

The board has outsourced the financial back-office operations of the school to a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) while maintaining appropriate oversight. The CPA prepares monthly reports comparing budgeted to actual expenses and a balance sheet.

<b>Benchmark 3B</b>	<b>3B</b>	<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>
<b>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</b>		

The school developed a five-year plan as part of its initial charter application. Subsequently, it has prepared and adopted annual budgets for school operations. The budgets have been conservatively developed. Tapestry has had balanced budgets for its first four years of operations. The school ended the fiscal years 2001 through 2004 within its planned budgets. Total actual revenues have exceeded total actual expenses in its first three years. The school has been at essentially full enrollment each year.

The annual budget is developed in conjunction with the principal, the outside accountant, the finance/audit committee and staff. The process typically begins in January and is completed in time for the full board to review, discuss, modify and approve the budget by the middle of May. Modifications to the budget are not typically made with the focus on the overall budget rather on individual line items. A process by which material budget adjustments could be made, as needed, could increase the effectiveness of monitoring by the board.

<b>Benchmark 3C</b>	<b>3C</b>	<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>
<b>Internal Controls</b>		

The school developed fiscal policies which address external compliance, internal compliance, purchasing, cash disbursements, cash receipts, bank reconciliations, payroll, preparation of financial statements, property management and fixed assets.

The off-site accountant prepares the financial statements on a monthly basis and reviews them with board representatives for the board presentation. Oversight over cash disbursements is strengthened by the practices of attaching supporting documentation to all checks and requiring two signatures for each (the school director and one board member).

The independent auditor has not issued management letters and, as a result, the school has not needed to follow up on any such comments. Also, the school's annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. The board reviews and approves the annual financial statement audit report, and meets separately with the independent auditor.

The school's outside CPA prepares a monthly schedule of grant income and expenses that shows the total income, expenses and any excess or deficiency of income over expenses. Such schedule is a useful tool for school administrators to use in tracking grant activity. The schedule could be enhanced by displaying the budget of each grant.

The school has a system to record fixed assets and performs an inventory annually. It does not use property control tags to identify its property. Property control tags could assist in the inventory process and in the identification of such property. It does clearly identify books received from the Buffalo City School district through textbook aid.

<b>Benchmark 3D</b>	<b>3D</b>	<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>
<b>Financial Reporting</b>		

The school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were filed early or on time with no material exceptions. Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor's opinion, the school's financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school's financial statements. However, for its first three audits, neither the financial statements nor the notes to the financial statements presented information about expenses by their functional classification, such as major classes of program services and supporting activities. Such presentation is required by Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) Statement No. 117 (*Financial Statements for Not-for Profit Organizations*). For its fourth annual audit, the financial statements did include this information to help the users of the statements assess the organization's service efforts, including the cost of its program and how it uses resources. FASB Statement No. 117 further encourages, but does not require, organizations such as schools, to provide information about expenses by their natural expense classification. A natural classification of expenses would include such categories as salaries, rent, electricity, depreciation, interest, and professional fees. The school's statements have presented expenses by their natural classification in each year.

<b>Benchmark 3E</b>	<b>3E</b>	<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).</b>
<b>Financial Condition</b>		

The school completed the 2003-04 school year in stable financial condition. The school's total net assets increased by \$42,111 and it finished with total net assets of \$318,417. Overall, the school's cash position improved by \$20,063. The school's operating activities provided positive cash flow of \$111,563, the school invested in the purchase of leasehold improvements and equipment totaling \$31,461 and the school repaid \$60,039 on its line of credit and long-term debt. The school has received contributions totaling \$24,283 to support its operations. It is not overly dependent on variable forms of fundraising.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$430,131 that consist of leasehold improvements, furniture and equipment. The school has nominal long-term debt (\$3,509). The school has a five-year non-cancelable operating lease for its facility that expires in June 2006. Rent expense for the year ended June 30, 2004 was \$145,948. Rent expense for FY 2006 is estimated to be \$243,750 (plus property taxes of \$39,000).



## Renewal Question 4

### Should the School's Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?

#### Benchmark 4A

#### Curricular & Assessment Plans

#### 4A

**The school's curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable and are likely to improve student learning and achievement.**

Schools that plan to retain or augment curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have provided evidence that the implementation of that design has resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter.

Schools that propose a material redesign to the curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a new charter have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the increased academic performance of children, and a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new curricular design. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

Schools that seek to add grade levels not included in the approval of the original charter have presented an outline of the curriculum and specific assessment plans for the term of a future charter. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

As a component of Tapestry Charter School's renewal application, the school is requesting to expand to serve students in grades K-12 by establishing a high school. The school hopes to open the high school in the 2006-07 school year, initially serving 48 students in the ninth grade. Beginning in 2007-08, each new incoming class of freshmen will consist of 72 students. When fully serving all grades K-12, which the school anticipates will occur in the 2009-10 school year, Tapestry Charter School will serve a total of 504 students. The school proposes extending the use of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) to guide its instruction at the high school grades.<sup>15</sup>

Tapestry Charter School plans to use the 2005-06 school year as a planning year prior to enrolling ninth graders. The inclusion of a planning year is a strong design element that will allow the school to ensure that it can locate a suitable facility, hire and train qualified staff, and create specificity in plans for the day-to-day operation of a high school.

In its renewal application, Tapestry has provided the general outline of a high school academic curriculum using the state's published performance standards. The school has not yet presented a scope and sequence or discussed how the curriculum will be adapted to meet local needs and be consistent with the school's mission and philosophy. In addition, only key academic subjects are included in the application.

<sup>15</sup> Tapestry Charter School was selected by ELOB and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to be one of 20 small high schools implementing the ELOB model. Eight of the schools will be located in New York City, with the remaining 12 schools located across the United States.

Given its planning year, Tapestry would be able to develop the components of the curriculum with greater specificity, while focusing on the state's performance standards. The discussion centering on the practices used in the development and implementation of the K-8 program would seem to indicate similar activities will occur during the development and implementation of high school programming. Ultimately, the school should be able to demonstrate the correlation of its locally developed curriculum to the Core Curriculum/Resource Guides and New York State Standards, which appear likely to support the rigorous graduation requirements the school set for itself.

The Gates foundation will provide support to ELOB and Tapestry Charter School by funding professional development and instructional leadership as the school implements ELOB in the high school. The support includes a full time instructional guide to assist high school teachers in designing and delivering curriculum. In addition, Tapestry will receive 50 days of coaching and professional development from an ELOB instructional leader with experience in high school curriculum and assessment design.

The school's administrative structure will include an executive director, a head of the K-8 school and a principal of the high school grades 9-12. The school's founder and current instructional leader will serve as the executive director in charge of the academic and organizational success of Tapestry Charter School grades K-12. This individual's success in leading Tapestry Charter School in the term of its current charter provides confidence that the proposed growth to include a high school will succeed.

The Gates Foundation, ELOB, and the Tapestry board of trustees have worked together to identify a principal for the proposed high school. This individual has a background of working with students at greatest academic need and has received training in curriculum and assessment design with ELOB. The proposed high school principal will spend the next year receiving additional training, recruiting and training staff, as well as guiding the finalization of the Tapestry Charter School course of study.

The ELOB model has been implemented in few high schools across the country. One of its most successful implementations is at Codman Academy in Dorchester, MA. Serving a low income, urban population, Codman Academy Charter School's 2005 graduating class achieved mixed results on the Massachusetts state assessments. However, all 20 members of Codman Academy's graduating class were accepted into college, most with financial assistance.

Tapestry Charter School's high school program will continue the school's practice of using the New York State curriculum guidelines to develop courses of study in all content areas. Tapestry will also continue its practice of using New York State Assessments in all subjects and all grades where they are required. The school will offer all New York State Regents examinations. Also, the school will continue its practice of using the Terra Nova nationally normed standardized assessments to assess student progress in grades where New York State assessments and Regents exams are not available. In addition, students will be required to present a portfolio of their work to a jury of educators as a requirement of passing from grade ten into grade eleven.

As an additional graduation requirement, seniors will be required to present to a jury for evaluation a graduation portfolio that exemplifies graduation requirements as outlined by the New York State Regents. Evidence produced during the term of Tapestry Charter School's first charter shows that the school has been successful at preparing students to meet or exceed the demands of New York State Performance Standards as measured by nationally normed standardized assessments as well as New York State assessments.

The school has provided a high school course progression plan that requires students to accumulate 24.5 credits for graduation; two and a half credits more than are required by the Regents. All required courses for students to attain a Regents or Regents Plus diploma are included in the school's academic plan. Tapestry High School's core academic program will be a standard college preparatory program without a variety of electives offered in-house. The school has established a partnership with Canisius College that will allow students access to college level coursework and will permit enrichment and acceleration opportunities for students who meet expectations ahead of schedule. If a student can go beyond the standard program, additional credits can be earned through these educational partnerships including distance learning opportunities for Advanced Placement credit.

At the end of each trimester (December/March/June), the regular schedule of classes will be suspended for *Intensive Week*. In this week, core academic and special education staff will provide remediation to students in specified areas of academic need, while special area subject teachers will coordinate enrichment activities with community partners (including SAT prep) for students who are demonstrating satisfactory achievement.

To receive course credit, a student must earn an A (90-100), B (80-90), or C (70-80), with a grade no lower than C- (70) by the end of the school year. If a student has a grade below 70 at the end of the school year, despite access to tutoring and reasonable accommodations made for skill deficits, the student will receive "No Credit." The course must be repeated in part or in whole, as determined by the teacher. A student may participate in the Buffalo Public Schools summer school program without cost and will be encouraged to do so. Summer school results will be reviewed by Tapestry Charter School staff to determine if credit was earned.

The "New Student Induction Plan," presented by Tapestry as a part of its expansion request, includes thoughtful and sufficient strategies to allow for students who may enter the high school with specific educational needs to establish a strong foundation on which to succeed. The school will, in compliance with lottery terms specified in New York State's Charter Schools Act, hold a lottery targeting all students eligible for high school in Buffalo. The school specifically plans to hold an early lottery, in December each year, to allow for the school to meet and assess new students' academic needs. After enrollment into the school, Tapestry plans to use the following placement assessments to determine individual student's academic needs: *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literary Skills* for reading fluency; the *Degrees of Reading Power* for reading comprehension; and the *Wide Range Achievement Test* for spelling and math computation. The school plans to create a skill improvement plan for each enrolled child based on these assessment results. The school seeks to connect incoming students with Canisius College students for potential tutorials to assist students in skill building over the summer months. In addition, the school plans to hold half-day tutoring opportunities with Tapestry teachers during summer training days in the summer of 2006.

The Institute finds that Tapestry Charter School's proposed plans for the term of a future charter to be reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

<p><b>Benchmark 4B</b></p> <p><b>Accountability Plan</b></p>	<p><b>4B</b></p>	<p><b>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school's measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</b></p> <p>The school's proposed Accountability Plan follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.</p>
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The school has submitted an Accountability Plan that generally follows the guidelines set by the Institute but will require some revision should the school's request to grow to a high school be approved. As with all charters coming to renewal, the Institute will work with Tapestry Charter School staff to finalize the Accountability Plan for inclusion in a new charter.

<p><b>Benchmark 4C</b></p> <p><b>School Calendar &amp; Enrollment</b></p>	<p><b>4C</b></p>	<p><b>The school has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction. Additionally, the school has provided an enrollment plan outlining the grades and growth patterns it anticipates during the term of a future charter.</b></p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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The sample calendar, number of days, and proposed hours of instruction presented by the school are reasonable, feasible, and achievable. The school's enrollment plan (described in Benchmark 4A) accurately plans for the grades and growth patterns it anticipates in the term of a future charter.

**Benchmark 4D**  
**Fiscal & Facility Plans**

**4D**

**The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.**

The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school's fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.

The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period, although finding a suitable facility for its high school presents a challenge. In addition, operating the K-8 program in a separate facility from the high school will limit, to some extent, the school's ability to capitalize fully on economies of scale. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. The school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts.

On a strict accounting basis, the school's plan for the current year and a future charter shows an estimated net decrease in net assets of \$35,000. On a cash flow basis, the plan projects a total increase in cash of \$72,000 over that period. The school has demonstrated it can operate in a fiscally sound manner during its current charter period. For example, the school was able to adjust to reduced per-pupil funding in FY 2003 and FY 2004 without ill effects on their program. Aiding the school in this regard has been its ability to consistently maintain full (planned) enrollment.

The school's plan has assumed three percent increases in its per-pupil funding. This projected increase exceeds the historical average the school has received since its inception. The assumption is lower than the increases in the last two years (3.9 percent and 5.3 percent). In addition, when compared to the actual and projected annual general fund expenditure increases of the Buffalo City School District of 7 percent to 12 percent<sup>16</sup> through FY 2009, the assumption is considered reasonable. While the per-pupil funding formula is based on more factors<sup>17</sup> than simply general fund expenditures, this metric can provide a reasonable approximation for the trend in per-pupil funding.

The plan provides for sufficient staffing and related costs. Assumptions related to facilities are also reasonable and appropriately anticipate renovation costs of \$60,000 in each of the first four years. The plan also provides for the accumulation of a reserve for purchasing a building of \$20,000 per year for the next five years.

<sup>16</sup> Source: *Buffalo City School District Four-Year Fiscal Plan 2004-2005 to 2008-2009* revised April 29, 2005 <http://www.buffaloschools.org/District/DistrictInner.aspx?PID=15>

<sup>17</sup> Per pupil funding is calculated by starting with total general fund expenditures and then subtracting deductible revenues and expenditures to determine a district's Approved Operating Expense (AOE). AOE is divided by a school district's Total Allowable Pupil Units (TAPU) to estimate that district's average expenditures on an average pupil. The TAPU is based on a school district's adjusted average daily attendance and also includes additional weightings for high school and summer school students and for students with special educational needs. The AOE/TAPU calculation is based on two-year-old data and therefore is adjusted to reflect two years of statewide changes in education expenditures. The result is the adjusted expense per pupil to be used by the district with resident students attending charter schools.