



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE AS TO THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER RENEWAL OF THE SOUTH BUFFALO CHARTER SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 18, 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.¹

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”).² More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

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

²The State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (revised January 25, 2005) are available at 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.³

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

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.⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁷

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

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

⁵ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁶ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

⁷ 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")⁸ 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").⁹ 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 de-briefings for the school's Board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, 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?

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

⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.

¹⁰ 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. Recommendation and Executive Summary

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 Benchmarks 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

The South Buffalo Charter School (South Buffalo or SBCS) was approved by the State University Trustees in January 2000 and opened in September of that year. The school is located in a former district elementary school at 2219 South Park Avenue, Buffalo, New York, which it initially leased and subsequently bought. It also leases space to a community center. The school currently enrolls 531 students in grades Kindergarten through eight.

The mission of the South Buffalo Charter School is as follows:

The South Buffalo Charter School seeks to provide equitable opportunities for all students to attain academic achievement that links character education with a rigorous academic program and technology.

The South Buffalo Charter School resulted from a desire by local residents to create public school choice and increase educational opportunities in the City of Buffalo. The city's magnet schools have waiting lists of five students for each available seat, demonstrating a citywide desire for additional public school opportunities.

The school was chartered with a governance structure that included the school contracting with a management company (initially Beacon Education Management, then Chancellor Beacon Academies, and currently Imagine Schools) to manage the day-to-day functions of the school. On January 25, 2005, the South Buffalo Charter School Board of Trustees submitted an amendment to its application for charter renewal seeking a modification in its management structure. The school has ended its contract with the management company and has secured the full-time services of a business administrator who reports directly to the Board.

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation: The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for renewal of the South Buffalo Charter School (SBCS) and authorize the renewal of the charter for a period of five years consistent with the terms of the renewal application, except that for any part of the 2004-05 school year that such renewal period is operative, the school shall have authority to provide instruction to such grades and such numbers of students as it is authorized in such school year to serve pursuant to its present charter.

Summary Discussion

South Buffalo Charter School currently serves 531 students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. As outlined in its application for charter renewal, the school looks to continue to serve students from Kindergarten through grade eight adding a section of fifth grade in 2005-06, a section of sixth grade in 2006-07, a section of seventh grade in 2007-08, and a section of eighth grade in 2008-09 for a maximum enrollment of 657 students in the term of a future charter.

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. Based on the findings and evidence gathered to date, the Institute has determined that South Buffalo Charter School is eligible for a five-year renewal and recommends that the State University Trustees approve the school's renewal application and authorize renewal of the charter for that five-year period.

South Buffalo Charter School has met or exceeded most of its goals on key academic measures. In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade state English Language Arts examinations, 67 percent of South Buffalo fourth graders attending the school for two or more years passed the state exam compared to 34.3 percent of all fourth graders enrolled in the Buffalo City School District. Also in 2003-04, the most recent data available, 81.1 percent of fourth graders attending SBCS for two or more years passed the state mathematics examination compared to 62.5 percent of all fourth graders in the Buffalo City School District passing the test. With one exception in its first year, SBCS outperformed the Buffalo City School District in English Language Arts and mathematics in each year of operation where data is available. In 2003-04, it had almost twice as many students as the Buffalo City Schools scoring at the proficient level or higher. Notably, 98 percent of SBCS students attending the school for two or more years scored at the proficient level or higher on the state's fourth grade science examination. As 2004-05 is the first year the school has enrolled eighth graders, no quantitative

data on student performance is available at the time of this recommendation. Analysis of the qualitative data gathered at the sixth through eighth grade level during the renewal visit suggests the school's program at that level is sufficient and maturing into a program likely to be as strong as that in Kindergarten through fifth grade. The school has significantly improved student learning and achievement, and the school is in good standing under No Child Left Behind.

At the time of the renewal visit in the fall of 2004, the school generally 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, including a rigorous curriculum and comprehensive set of structures for faculty development. In addition, the school has benefited from consistent leadership at the Board level. Most of the school's founding trustees remain on the Board. The Board has guided the school in a successful effort to secure, fund and renovate a suitable facility that will serve the school in the term of a future charter. The school has maintained overall financial health and is a viable and effective organization. Finally, parents are enthusiastic about the school, and the school maintains a long waiting list and has a record of compliance with applicable law.

The Institute finds that the school would continue to be run in an educationally and fiscally sound manner, would likely continue to improve student learning and achievement, meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law and, if re-chartered, would materially further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act. Accordingly, the Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approves South Buffalo Charter School's application for charter renewal and authorize renewal of the school's charter for a full five-year period.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

Finding 1: South Buffalo Charter School has met most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts and mathematics; where it did not, the school generally made meaningful and consistent progress toward its goals. In 2004, South Buffalo Charter School met all of its outcome measures in math as measured by performance on New York State's fourth grade mathematics examination and on the Stanford 9 nationally normed standardized assessment.

Finding 2: South Buffalo Charter School has, over the term of its charter, provided instruction in grades Kindergarten through six that is generally competent, purposeful, and explicit. Classroom instruction keeps students engaged, focused and promotes the development of skills that are aligned with state standards. Classroom instruction in grades seven and eight is at times insufficiently challenging to ensure the school provides instruction characterized by the academic rigor envisioned in its charter.

Finding 3: The school has established an orderly, disciplined environment where children feel safe and which promotes effective instruction. The school has yet to build a culture at its highest grades that consistently values scholarly excellence and realizes the school's mission of academic rigor.

South Buffalo Charter School has met most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. Where it has not met goals it set for itself, the school has generally made meaningful progress toward meeting them. In 2003-04, South Buffalo met all of its outcome measures in math. On the state's fourth grade mathematics assessment, 81.1 percent of fourth graders attending South Buffalo Charter School for two years or more passed the test while 62.5 percent of fourth graders enrolled in the Buffalo City Schools passed the test.

While it did not meet all of its Accountability Plan goals for English Language Arts, South Buffalo came close to meeting its absolute measure of performance on the state's fourth grade ELA exam. 66.7 percent of South Buffalo Charter School fourth graders enrolled in the school for two or more years passed the 2003-04 New York State English Language Arts assessment compared to a

passing rate of 34.3 percent for all fourth graders enrolled in the Buffalo City Schools.

Over the term of its current charter, classroom instruction at South Buffalo Charter School has been sufficient to assist the school in reaching most of its Accountability Plan goals. Instruction in Kindergarten through fourth grades has been, with few exceptions, strong. In the last year of the school's charter, instruction at grades five and six was observed to be sufficient to assist students in reaching standards. However, at the time of the renewal visit, instruction in grades seven and eight was uneven and did not consistently reflect the instructional or content rigor necessary to ensure that all students will enter high school having mastered all necessary state performance standards.

As the 2004-05 school year is SBCS's first in enrolling students in the eighth grade, the school has not presented state assessment data to indicate a complete picture of success in its middle grades. The school's Board of Trustees and interim Principal rightly identified the need for additional instructional rigor at SBCS. As such, the school has contracted with successful retired teachers to work with instructors at the upper grades to plan and execute lessons that reflect the content and skills required for students to succeed in high school.

2. Is the School An Effective, Viable Organization?

Finding 1: The school's stable, committed and capable Board of Trustees has provided sound governance during the term of the current charter and remains focused on continually increasing levels of student achievement.

Finding 2: Students appear broadly satisfied with South Buffalo Charter School and praise its instructional clarity and orderly atmosphere. Parents cite strong communication and the individual attention provided to each child as reasons for the school's success. Few students leave the school once enrolled, indicating a vote of confidence by South Buffalo Charter School's parents.

Finding 3: With exceptions in the areas of Freedom of Information Law and Open Meetings Law compliance, 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 by-laws and the provisions of its charter.

South Buffalo Charter School's Board of Trustees has led the school effectively during the term of its current charter. In addition to securing a bright and welcoming permanent facility, Board members are regular visitors to the school. Parents who are also Board members speak enthusiastically about the teaching staff and the level of academic success the school assists students in attaining.

South Buffalo Charter School students and parents consistently cite character education and the orderliness demanded by teachers as reasons they are pleased with the school. Teachers communicate student progress to parents formally through report cards, online progress reports, and at conferences. Parents cite frequent informal contact with teachers before and after school and through phone conversations as reasons the school works well with parents to create a learning-focused environment.

Over ninety percent of students re-enroll at South Buffalo Charter School suggesting that parents who choose SBCS for their child's education persist with that choice year after year. This provides a strong indication of the need for SBCS and its ability to satisfy the educational hopes and desires of parents for their children.

The South Buffalo Charter School Board of Trustees submitted an amendment to the school's application for charter renewal on January 25, 2005, that outlines the termination of South Buffalo Charter School's agreement with its management company. From the start of its current charter, South Buffalo Charter School contracted with Beacon Education Management to oversee the operation of the school. Beacon Education Management became Chancellor Beacon Academies in 2003 and Imagine Schools in 2004. While the management company initially provided curricular, assessment, and administrative set-up and oversight to South Buffalo Charter School, in the last two years the management company has provided minimal services limited to payroll and other administrative functions. In the last years of the school's current charter, the South Buffalo Charter School Board managed curriculum, assessment, personnel, regulatory and legal operations without assistance from the management company. As noted in the benchmarks below, the Board displays a keen understanding of all operations of the school and a strong commitment to ensuring all South Buffalo Charter School students attain high academic standards.

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Finding 1: The Board has provided effective financial 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 strong financial condition.

Over the life of its charter, 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 operated at a surplus in each of its first four years.

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. Reports have been complete and the school has followed generally accepted accounting principles.

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

Finding 1: The school's future curricular, assessment, and Accountability Plans are reasonable, feasible, and achievable.¹¹

Finding 2: The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter. The Board is aware of and attending to changes in its oversight role as it moves from using a management company to its own internal business administration.

During the term of a future charter, SBCS looks to continue serving students in Kindergarten through eighth grade and to utilize the curricular and assessment design in use at the end of its current charter. As indicated by the data available at the end of the

¹¹ The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State's testing regimen or revisions to the Institute's Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

school's current charter, SBCS has implemented a program that succeeds at assisting a majority of its students in meeting state performance standards. However, as 2004-05 is the first year the school has instructed students at the eighth grade level, no quantitative data as measured by state or national standardized tests is available. Qualitative evidence gathered at the renewal visit indicates that instruction and student work products at grades seven and eight have yet to reach the level required to have all students meet state standards.

The school has placed mentor teachers in the seventh and eighth grades to assist in raising the level of rigor in instruction and student work. The mentors work closely with teachers in planning, modeling and assessing lessons and student work. With continued focus and leadership in improving instruction at upper grades, the plans the school presents for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period. Some uncertainty remains about the school's facility plans. However, the school has put together its fiscal plans based on known conditions, although they are subject to change. In its first charter period, the school has been fiscally prudent and focused on making educationally and fiscally sound decisions. The Institute finds, given the Board's track record and the overall fiscal stability of the school, that plans for a future charter are reasonable and feasible and have a strong likelihood of being achievable.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?		
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1.1	Absolute Measures (New York State Assessments): 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.
	1A.1.2	Comparative Measures: 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.
	1A.1.3	Value-added Measures: 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.
	1A.1.4	NCLB Measure: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
	1A.1.5	Unique Academic Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.

Academic Attainment & Improvement

South Buffalo Charter School has met most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. Where it has not met goals it set for itself, the school has generally made meaningful progress toward meeting them. In 2003-04, South Buffalo met all of its outcome measures in math. While it did not meet all of its goals in ELA, South Buffalo came close to meeting its absolute measure of performance on the state's fourth grade ELA exam. In addition, it outperformed the Buffalo City District on the state exam and made some progress on the Stanford 9 ELA exam.

In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, South Buffalo made progress toward meeting its goal from its first to second year of operation. In its third year, scores declined and in 2003-04, its fourth year, increased significantly, bringing the school close to meeting its goal of having 70 percent of fourth graders at the proficient level. In math, South Buffalo has generally experienced a consistent trend of year-to-year increases in the absolute level of performance. In 2003-04, South Buffalo exceeded its goal in math.

In its comparative level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, South Buffalo has outperformed the Buffalo City School District in ELA and math during each of its four years of operation, with the exception of the math exam in its first year. Aside from this one instance, South Buffalo has had a higher percent of students at the proficient level or higher. In 2003-04, it had almost twice as many students as the Buffalo City schools scoring at the proficient level or higher.

Results have been mixed on the value-added to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the Stanford 9 Test. In Reading, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring remained the same and declined in the two years for which results can be calculated. In Total Math, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring declined in the first year and increased in the second year such that the school met the goal of its value-added math outcome measure in 2003-04.

The State Education Department has deemed South Buffalo 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. South Buffalo did not include any unique outcome measures in its Accountability Plan.

Overall, the results indicate that most South Buffalo students are being prepared for middle school by virtue of the proportion who are scoring proficient on the fourth grade state examinations. South Buffalo students have generally performed better than its Accountability Plan comparison, the Buffalo City School District. These results indicate that the academic program has had some success; however, the value-added data also show that the instructional program has not enabled students to make consistent progress across the grades in reading. The math results show that South Buffalo has begun to make progress toward achieving the overall math goal stated in its Accountability Plan.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, South Buffalo 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 South Buffalo set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹²

In addition to being held to these accountability measures, South Buffalo 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. South Buffalo's accountability status in the most recent report is indicated below.

¹² As 2000-01 was the school's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year. Because the Stanford 9 tests were lost in that first year, there are also no value-added results for 2001-02.

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			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	70% of all fourth grade students who have attended the SBCS for at least two full academic years will score at the proficient level (level3) or higher on the 4 th grade New York State Assessment for reading.	4	56% ¹	64% ¹	51%	67%
Math	70% of the students who have attended the SBCS for a minimum of two full school years will achieve at the proficient level or higher on the 4 th grade NYS Assessment.	4	45% ¹	60% ¹	58%	81%
Science	70% of fourth grade students who have attended the SBCS for a minimum of two full academic years will achieve at the proficient level or above on the NYSPET Science Test at the age appropriate levels. ²	4	N/A	N/A	59% ¹	98%
Social Studies	70% of the students who have attended the SBCS for two full academic years will achieve the proficient level or above on the Grade 5 NYS Social Studies Assessment.	5	No students in grade	87% ¹	72% ¹	59%

¹ Results are for all tested students irrespective of time enrolled.

² Results on the science exam in 2000-01 to 2002-03 represent the proportion of students answering a pre-determined number of questions correctly (*i.e.*, the state designated level).

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Students who have attended the SBCS for two full academic years will outperform the Buffalo Public School District on the NYS 4 th grade assessment for reading. (Percent of students proficient or higher.)	4	South Buffalo District	56.5 ¹	64.0 ¹	51.4	66.7
				35.8	33.9	33.9	34.3
Math	Students who have attended the SBCS for two full academic years will outperform the Buffalo Public School District on the NYS 4 th grade math assessment. (Percent of students proficient or higher.)	4	South Buffalo District	45.4 ¹	60.0 ¹	58.3	81.1
				50.2	45.3	57.6	62.5

¹ Results are for all tested students irrespective of time enrolled.

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

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading	Based on the Stanford 9, the mean total reading score of student cohorts in each grade will increase by 4 percentiles per year , on average, over the course of the charter. (Results reported in NCEs.)	All	N/A	N/A	0.0	(-1.0)
Math	Based on the Stanford 9, the mean total math score of student cohorts in each grade will increase by 4 percentiles per year , on average, over the course of the charter. (Results reported in NCEs.)	All	N/A	N/A	(-1.8)	3.9

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states South Buffalo's 2003-04 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

The school had an additional social studies outcome measure in its Accountability Plan, but no results were reported in the Renewal Application.

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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; ● the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved; ● the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction; ● 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 ● the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement. <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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South Buffalo Charter School uses a number of assessment instruments that provide data for teachers' use in systematically improving student learning. Each year, students take New York State examinations and a nationally normed standardized test. Data from these standardized assessments are analyzed in the classroom and by the Board of Trustees. In addition to monitoring the school's progress in the aggregate, standardized test performance of individual students are used to create in-class groupings and to identify students for increased academic support. Renewal visitors observed many lessons and classes during the visit where students were divided into groups focused on specific academic needs of students. Teachers combine information from standardized assessments with results from end of unit examinations from the school's mathematics and English Language Arts curricula along with weekly teacher-created assignments and quizzes to identify students' academic needs.

Primary grade teachers use a reading inventory that requires students to read words in isolation and in a reading passage and to listen for information to gauge student literacy progress. In addition, the school uses writing rubrics¹³ at each grade level that lay out

¹³ Rubrics are lists of attributes that articulate the specific expectations for student work products. Quality rubrics define for students and teachers the qualities of grammar, language mechanics, and depth of content expected for the student to meet expectations of standards.

expectations for student performance in grammar, language mechanics, and content. The rubrics available for review during the renewal visit reflect the demands of state English Language Arts standards. Generally, teachers' use of rubrics was observed across the school with the strongest implementation at grades three and four.

A challenge that remains for South Buffalo Charter School is increasing teachers' ability to effectively link data on student performance with the consistent implementation of focused and successful instruction. This is especially true in the seventh and eighth grades where content requirements increase in rigor and lay the foundation for student opportunities to succeed in high school and beyond.

The school's planned change from using the Stanford 9 nationally normed standardized test to the use of the Terra Nova nationally normed standardized test presents an additional challenge in that the change will create a break in South Buffalo's ability to track value-added student progress from the first four years of instruction into the term of a potential future charter. The school asserts the Terra Nova more accurately reflects and measures the demands of the New York State assessments and will therefore allow a better match for the school to analyze student progress toward state standards. Of concern to renewal visitors is that the school will be without robust longitudinal test data that allows for long term analysis of instructional deficiencies and/or gaps in the curricula. The school's success in continuing to increase student achievement on multiple measures rests on its ability to fine tune existing classroom practice into consistently powerful instruction targeted at specific student academic needs. This is critically important in grades five through eight as the school prepares students for success on eighth grade examinations.¹⁴

¹⁴ The school enrolled eighth grade students for the first time in the 2004-05 school year and as such has yet to post data on student performance on the state's eighth grade examinations.

<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p> <p>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance standards.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.</p>
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South Buffalo Charter School's Board of Trustees contracted with Beacon Management at the beginning of the term of this charter and utilized the Beacon Lightpoints Curriculum. Beacon Management became Chancellor Beacon and is currently Imagine Schools. Imagine Schools describes its curriculum as follows:¹⁵

"At Imagine Schools, we believe that there are four main ingredients of robust, successful learning. First, schools must have a team of qualified teachers who are committed to implement the school's mission and educational approach. Second, teachers need a curriculum that stresses mastery of the basic building blocks of learning, while providing subject matter that is rich, varied and that engages students' curiosity and imagination. Third, in order to learn, students must have a school environment that is safe, orderly, purposeful and positive. Fourth, the school must involve parents in the educational mission, and parents must take an active role in their children's schooling. Imagine Schools, in partnership with local schools, works hard to provide these ingredients in the recipe for student achievement.

Rather than develop or promote one particular curriculum, Imagine School's approach is to operate within sound, tested educational principles. These principles serve as guidelines for Imagine Schools, in partnership with a local school, to evaluate and select the curriculum most appropriate for their student population. At Imagine Schools, we respect the distinct mission of each local school with whom we partner. Schools often choose their program of study and curriculum to meet the specific needs of their students. Imagine Schools is dedicated to meeting the educational needs and aspirations of every student, using the following educational principles as our parameters.

- *Phonics reading program in the primary grades.*
- *Emphasis on the basic skills of reading fluency, writing, grammar, spelling, oral communication, and computation.*
- *Moral/character education that is integrated into all classes and subject areas.*
- *Curricular materials that offer rich literature, art, music and drama.*
- *Math, science and history curricula that emphasize sequential learning, mastery of critical skills, and project-based instruction that accesses various learning styles.*

¹⁵ Taken from the Imagine Schools website on January 27, 2005.
http://www.chancellorbeacon.com/educationalapproach_prek-8.asp

- *Covenants with students and parents outlining the expectations of participation by the student, parent, and the school.*
- *Frequent and consistent assessment of student progress; the results used to diagnose and address individual student performance as well as to improve the overall instructional program.*
- *Intervention and intensive help for any student who is struggling to learn/or not achieving at grade level in a particular subject area.”*

A review of the curriculum during the renewal visit showed the school links its curricular material choices to the demands of the New York State Curriculum Standards and the Core Knowledge Sequence. For English Language Arts instruction the school uses the Scott Foresman reading series and supplements the series with literature books. Phonics is taught using Explicit Phonics materials. Every teacher presented renewal visitors with a variety of writing rubric samples. Notably, even the Kindergarten teachers have rubrics that articulate expectations for punctuation and sentence structure ensuring students build a strong foundation in writing from the early years. The school currently uses the Scott Foresman math series for math. Curricula in science, art, music, physical education and technology also link to the demands of state performance standards. In addition, the school provides Spanish instruction to all students.

School leaders, consultants, and teachers continue to work together to refine and enhance the school’s curricular offerings. As the school creates curriculum units, attention is paid to using data on student performance to assess how to construct and deploy each lesson. The school is working to ensure that each lesson within all curricular units includes specific details regarding student work products and is working to increase teacher dexterity with designing assessments that effectively measure student progress toward attaining high academic standards.

<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p> <p>Strong instructional leadership girds the school’s work in improving student learning and achievement.</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>
	<p>1D.2</p> <p>Quality instruction is evident throughout the school fostering an academic learning environment and actively supporting the academic achievement of children.</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>
	<p>1D.3</p> <p>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.</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>

Over the life of the school’s charter, instruction at SBCS has generally been solid; intentional, clear and engaging. The school benefited from consistent leadership over the first four years of the charter and is currently under the lead of an interim Principal while the Board seeks an instructional leader that can build upon the school’s current foundation to ensure consistently high academic performance at all grade levels. The interim Principal is highly praised by teachers, parents and Board members for his demonstrated commitment to the school. Teachers report the interim Principal is constantly in and out of classrooms and provides the strongest support for discipline and orderliness the school has enjoyed during the term of this charter.

At the time of the renewal visit, the strongest instructional leadership observed in the building came from SBCS’s special service program coordinator. Teachers reported benefiting from her strong support in planning, delivering, and analyzing instruction. This supplemental program is a key part of the school design, and that it is well-run means that the school as a whole benefits from, in this important respect, strong instructional leadership.

As noted over the life of the school's current charter, SBCS benefits from strong instruction in a number of classrooms. However, strong and consistent instructional skills are not evident in every classroom. Renewal visit observations revealed the strongest instruction delivered by the school's multi-age, special needs, enrichment, Kindergarten through sixth grade teachers.

Lessons observed in these classrooms were generally characterized by effective instructional strategies that engaged students and reflected high expectations for student learning. In the most successful of these classrooms, lessons were always prefaced by clear instructions, teaching objectives were marked by transparency and intentionality, and student enthusiasm remained purposefully directed towards the exercises at hand.

In one classroom, students participated in an oral reading exercise during which the teacher systematically peppered students with questions designed to assess their comprehension skills. The teacher probed for plot, setting, authorial intention, prediction, and even asked vocabulary and spelling questions in conjunction with the reading lesson. When one student mentioned "the mountains" in response to a question about location, the teacher was quick to ask her class, "Who can spell *mountain* without looking at their book?" The teacher was consistently articulate and expressive while modeling speech and monitored student engagement by circulating throughout the room; a textbook example of how exemplary teachers weave together a myriad of instructional strategies that prioritize and result in academic success.

In another classroom, students worked at several small group activities that allowed the teacher to determine what students remembered from a review exercise conducted the day before and to prepare them for a formal assessment students would take on the following day. With very little chatter, students were able to gather into pre-arranged groups of four (achievers, inventors, challengers, *etc.*) and perform the various math exercises required at each center. Students drew random problems from a bin at each table (they included whole number multiplication, estimating products, and multiplying with decimals) and copied them into math journals as the teacher strolled the room to assess their work. Though the work was a review, it was appropriately challenging and engaging. Students appeared to take great delight in drawing particular kinds of problems, especially multiplying with decimals. Students worked diligently and transitioned between activities in less than a minute, immediately focusing on accurately completing the next assigned task. Across the hall, in a classroom at the same grade level, students were engaged in the same lesson and activities. Teachers and students in this classroom displayed the same interest, enjoyment, and commitment to learning.

Many, but not all, lessons observed during the renewal visit provided evidence of sufficient instruction. When noting observations of less effective lessons, renewal visitors cited miscommunication of expectations for student work, teacher inattentiveness to the progress and quality of individual or small group work, or insufficient classroom management techniques.

Of concern for renewal visitors was seventh and eighth grade instruction that was uninspiring and lacked the quality of academic rigor envisioned in the school's charter. Lessons observed during the renewal visit provided no sense of urgency around ensuring these students were properly prepared to excel in middle school and beyond. In most of these classes, students were either involved in rudimentary review exercises, or they listlessly indulged the banality of unfocused questions posed by teachers. In some classes, constant student chatter and inattentiveness thwarted the teachers' ability to effectively implement the lesson. Ineffective classroom management skills and lackluster lesson delivery provided students an opportunity to postpone or derail teachers' attempts at instruction. Across lessons observed in grades seven and eight, significant class time was

lost to preliminaries including getting students to settle in, teachers reading worksheet instructions word for word aloud to students, distributing lesson materials and the like. The instruction provided no indication during renewal observations that the faculty prized student achievement and focused on inspiring students to reach for academic excellence. It was clear that instructors at the school's highest grade levels need additional instructional support and leadership that will equip them with the knowledge and skills that ensure students succeed at the middle school level.

The school provides a multifaceted program for students at risk of academic failure. Seven Title I teachers and the program coordinator work with special needs and enrichment teachers to meet the individual needs of students. The special services coordinator and special services staff meet with grade level teams on a regular basis to analyze student test scores and classroom performance to determine which students require additional academic assistance. The school has identified 153 students in need of additional support.

SBCS uses standardized test scores, internal assessments and Individual Education Plans to identify students for inclusion in a multiage classroom. Classroom, Title I, and where called for in Individual Education Plans special education teachers work with the same students from various grade levels over a period of years. This structure provides consistency of instruction and diminishes lost instructional time for students to learn the new rituals and routines of a new teacher year-to-year. This structure also allows teachers to more specifically target instruction on student academic needs, no matter their age. Students assigned to multi-age classrooms join their grade level age-mates from other classrooms for special area classes such as art, physical education and music and may participate in pull-out groups taught by special education teachers, depending on the needs prescribed in Individual Education Plans.

In multi-age classrooms observed during the renewal visit, a concerted effort was made to focus on students' individual needs. In one class, the teacher worked with a small group of students on a flash card game designed to quiz students on cause and effect. Following this activity, the group played a board game (also assessing cause and effect). The teacher played the game with the students and an assistant observed and took notes regarding students' errors and achievement. When seven students from other classrooms arrived, students took their seats and engaged in an oral reading assignment that required them to highlight terms they did not understand. After finishing the reading task, students worked with a peer to define the words using a dictionary. Throughout all of this, the aid continued to take notes regarding individual student performance. The classroom teacher monitored correct pronunciation, decoding and asked questions to ensure students' understanding.

While SBCS classrooms are orderly and purposeful, renewal visitors found that, especially at the upper grades, teachers had yet to put in place instructional practice that exhorts students to strive for excellence, relates success in school to opening doors to success in life, or consistently communicates the expectation of excellence. Given SBCS's record of student achievement as measured by standardized tests and classroom observations during the renewal visit, SBCS students appear capable and ready to rise to the challenge of more demanding expectations for academic work. Without a demanding academic culture throughout the building, the school will not fully realize its mission of providing a "rigorous academic program."

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Teaching Staff</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.)</p>
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As recorded over the life of the school’s charter, SBCS teachers are generally competent in their assigned content areas. During the renewal visit, observations revealed competent instructors with adequate content area knowledge. All teachers were professional and extremely committed to improving student achievement. As noted above, the highest level of teacher competence was evident in third and fourth grade with many other grade levels characterized by the same teacher-led, purposeful and explicit instruction. Teacher competence at the school’s terminal grades did not reflect these strengths.

<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</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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As noted throughout the life of the school’s charter and continuing through the renewal visit, student behavior at South Buffalo Charter School promotes calm, safe classrooms where students participate in learning activities. Students are respectful of their peers, teachers, and school visitors maintaining attentiveness to learning tasks and teachers’ instruction. The school feels secure, calm and safe throughout where students and staff are upbeat and genuinely welcoming. The school’s practice of maintaining the same class with the same set of children over a period of years, termed “looping,” contributes to a focused and orderly setting as teachers and students work together over a period of years. Research on the practice with looping suggests that students lose less learning time at the beginning of each school year as the rituals and routines of the classroom and teacher expectations are known and instructional time is more readily focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Students noted the lack of bullying and general “fun” as two reasons for the school’s orderliness. Students spoke admirably and candidly in renewal visit interviews about personal academic struggles without hesitation or concern of negative responses from peers. Several parents interviewed during the renewal visit underscored SBCS’s success at creating a comfortable, non-stigmatizing environment for students of all backgrounds and abilities.

Though not rising to the level of discipline concerns, student attentiveness in a few classrooms was lacking. Renewal visitors reported a general lack of attention to task in the school’s highest grades in classrooms where teachers’ abilities to deliver well-paced, prepared, organized and engaging instruction was insufficient. In one classroom observed multiple times over the three day renewal visit, lessons were of low content level, poorly paced and invited student inattention on disruption.

<p>Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1G.1</p> <p>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.</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>1G.2</p> <p>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.</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>

Teachers at SBCS participate in beginning of the year professional development conducted for two weeks prior to the opening of school each year. In addition to examining student performance on standardized tests, working to refine the school’s internal assessments and designing curriculum and instruction plans in grade level teams, the school offers professional development in the use of curriculum materials such as the Scott Foresman reading program.

The school also employs mentor teachers, drawn from the ranks of expert retired teachers and administrators in the greater Buffalo area. Mentor teachers meet with grade level teams at least once a week to assist in the construction of lesson plans, review curricular links to the demands of state standards, and in some cases model instruction for classroom teachers. Teachers and the school’s Principal identify individual professional development needs. Based upon individual teacher needs, some mentors spend more time in classrooms assisting SBCS teachers in refining instructional practices and skills. In addition, an outside consultant works with the school to refine curriculum.

While the interim Principal, a former mentor teacher at the school, is a frequent visitor to classrooms, the school also uses a formal teacher evaluation system. The forms used for formal teacher evaluation are pedestrian and do not capture the depth of analysis necessary to document specific improvements in teacher skills. The teacher evaluation

instrument includes three ratings; excellent, satisfactory, and needs improvement for four categories of performance; classroom management, instructional techniques, lesson plans, and knowledge of subject matter. Evaluations reviewed during the renewal visit provided few substantive, specific recommendations for improving instructional practice. The recommendations for professional growth were often generic, *i.e.* “continue to develop as an educator,” or “I would like to see a vertical team relationship.” Rarely did evaluations contain pointed observations of specific strengths and weaknesses in a teacher’s job performance.

Renewal Question 2

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A
School Specific Non-Academic Goals

2A

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.

Character Education Goal I: Student behavior will give witness to the core values taught monthly.

Measure 1: At the end of the school year, each student will be able to define the school wide monthly virtues and give and explicit example of each in written form developed by the teacher.

The school presented evidence toward meeting this goal in its renewal application. Homeroom teachers gave a year-end assignment to students asking them to describe what they love about South Buffalo Charter School and how the school has helped them become better people and students. The school feels that these essays reflect the impact of its core virtue program. The school chose not, however, to ask students to define with explicit examples the monthly school wide virtues as stated in the measure, preferring the new end of year assignment.

Measure 2: Using the behavior rating scale, up to 10 “guests” from this community will come to the school and rate the student behavior and adherence to the virtues. Eighty percent of the “guests” will rate our students above average in their adherence to the core virtues including charity, courage and graciousness.

The school presented evidence toward meeting this goal in its renewal application. The results of the 2003-04 surveys have students rated well above average in terms of their adherence to the core virtues, according to the guest raters. The school states that this rating indicates that the atmosphere of the school, its halls, large group instruction area and classrooms are quiet, orderly, and conducive to learning.

Measure 3: Through parent surveys, 80 percent of parents responding will indicate that they see evidence that their children’s behavior has improved through their attendance at South Buffalo Charter School.

The school presented evidence toward meeting this goal in its renewal application; however the school does not include this specific question on the parent surveys. The school stated in its renewal application that several of the parent survey questions, however, give an indication of parents’ perception of children’s behavior. Generally, those questions addressed safe atmosphere, behavior management, overall performance, and quality of education. All of these questions scored above 94 percent.

Character Education Goal II: All students will be active community members and participate positively in building school community.

Measure 1: All students will give service to the community, some tutoring, involved with food drives or similar activities.

Based upon evidence presented in the school's renewal application, SBCS met this goal. All students have participated over the life of the charter in some form of community service. Some classes ran food drives, others donated money to the local needy. Other projects included: community cleanup, planting trees, and tutoring the lower grades.

<p>Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B</p> <p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</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 school’s mission is as follows:

The South Buffalo Charter School seeks to provide equitable opportunities for all students to acquire an education that links character education with rigorous academics, technology and careers to produce students who are prepared for success in the 21st century.

While the school’s mission is not yet fully realized and about one-third of students are not yet meeting state standards in ELA, the school is faithful to the mission, as Board members, parents, teachers, and school leaders frequently refer to the school’s mission and the school’s posted success as measured by state examinations. As noted elsewhere in this report, the school’s academic program is sufficient but not truly rigorous across all classrooms and grade levels, particularly the upper grades, leaving this element of the mission not fully realized.

Character education at the school is provided by teaching a monthly virtue and underscoring the implementation of the virtue in everyday classroom interactions. The school has also implemented its Connection Series designed to impact the choices of middle school students. Each classroom at SBCS includes three computers that, during the renewal visit, were frequently unused. The school also boasts a well-equipped computer lab where classes rotate in to use content software and word processing software to publish written work. Though the renewal visit did not primarily focus on the use of technology at the school, renewal visitors concluded the school’s supply of technology was not maximized to its fullest instructional potential. The school does use PowerSchool, a web based software that allows teachers to track student progress and parents to view student assignments and grades.

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance (Board of Trustees & School Leadership)</p>	<p>2C.1</p> <p>The Board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</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>2C.2</p> <p>The Board and school leadership clearly articulate the school's mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</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>

South Buffalo Charter School's Board of Trustees presents a strong understanding of the school's design and monitors its implementation with a strong commitment to fulfilling the school's mission. The Board regularly reviews school performance data. Most impressive during the renewal visit were the individual interactions between members of the school's Board and classroom teachers. Board members are keenly aware of the overall strengths of the school and informed regarding the challenges it faces as it continues to work toward its goals.

The Board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them. In the case of the complaint policy, however, the only written policy was in the school's charter and staff members were not aware of it. In addition, the school has not implemented its Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) policy. In contrast, the school has a very thorough set of policies in the area of special education, which is reflected by its special education documentation. The school does not have a Board

manual, but members have access to key documents. The school provides two different student manuals (Kindergarten through fourth and fourth through eighth) with different explanations of the discipline policy, which is more than adequate and complies with the I.D.E.A. While the parent manual lacks information regarding FOIL and the Open Meetings Law, it is distributed with a school calendar every year.

The Board's conflict of interest policy, taken together with provisions in the school's by-laws, adequately discusses self-dealing transactions. While there has been at least one interested transaction, the Board did fire the company involved when it did not provide expected service. Board members confirmed that the interested Board member recused himself. The Institute did not find sufficient evidence that all staff members received the code of ethics as set forth in the school's charter. Separately, there was evidence that the Board has maintained and abided by its by-laws.

The South Buffalo Charter School Board of Trustees submitted an amendment to the school's application for charter renewal on January 25, 2005, that outlines the termination of South Buffalo Charter School's agreement with its management company. From the start of its current charter, South Buffalo Charter School contracted with Beacon Education Management to oversee the operation of the school. Beacon Education Management became Chancellor Beacon Academies in 2003 and Imagine Schools in 2004. While the management company initially provided curricular, assessment, and administrative set-up and oversight to South Buffalo Charter School, in the last two years the management company has provided minimal services limited to payroll and other administrative functions. In the last years of the school's current charter, the South Buffalo Charter School Board managed curriculum, assessment, personnel, regulatory and legal operations without assistance from the management company. As noted above, the Board displays a keen understanding of all operations of the school and a strong commitment to ensuring all South Buffalo Charter School students attain high academic standards.

<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>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.</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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The school’s management company has administered parent satisfaction surveys annually. South Buffalo Charter School boasts the highest parent satisfaction rating (3.5 out of 4) of all the Chancellor Beacon/Imagine Schools. Parent satisfaction responses were consistently high over the term of its charter. Interviews conducted during the renewal visit underscored these results. Parents cited the strong school/home communication, welcoming nature of school leadership and teachers, and the scholastically oriented climate of the school as strong indicators of South Buffalo Charter School’s success. Parents credited the character education program and the school’s small size (relative to Buffalo City Schools) as two reasons the school was successful in posting comparatively strong student achievement results. South Buffalo has been fully enrolled over the term of its charter with a current waiting list of 337 children; a solid indication of demand for the school.

Students cited the efforts of teachers to make sure “we always understand” what is required in each learning task and told renewal visitors that SBCS teachers were “smarter” than teachers at their old schools. Students report a greater feeling of safety at SBCS and that it is easier to learn because there are fewer student disruptions.

The school includes the following goals and measures of parent and student satisfaction in its Accountability Plan:

Parent Involvement Goal I: Each year SBCS will meet target enrollment.

Measure 1: There will be an average yearly parent participation rate at conferences of 85 percent.

According to the information presented in SBCS’s renewal application, the school is moving towards this goal. Each year from 2001-02 through 2003-04, the average yearly parent participation rate at conferences has been at or over 80 percent.

Measure 2: There will be an average yearly parent participation rate at portfolio nights at 70 percent.

The school presents evidence of meeting this goal in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years. At the recommendation of the State Education Department, more emphasis was placed on project based learning activities during 2003-04, so the portfolio night was replaced by a project based learning night. The school reported attendance was difficult to verify, but teachers reported attendance at between 65-70 percent.

Measure 3: The cumulative average of the survey items will be a minimum of 3.0 out of 4.0 in the areas of: fulfilling the mission, high academic expectation, quality instruction, communication with families, and management of student behavior and safety of atmosphere.

The school reports meeting this goal in its application for renewal. The cumulative average of survey items each year has exceeded 3.0/4.0 in these areas. In the 2003-04 Parent Survey, 96 percent of parents responding rated the South Buffalo Charter School positively (3.5/4.0).

Organizational Viability Goal I: The SBCS will demonstrate that it will attract and maintain an enrolment that will ensure its financial viability.

Measure 1: During the school year, enrolment will remain at or above 95 percent capacity.

SBCS met this goal. During the first year of the school's charter, enrollment was at 94 percent capacity, and each year thereafter the school maintained an enrollment exceeding 95 percent of capacity.

Measure 2: The SBCS will maintain a waiting list equal to 10 percent of enrollment.

SBCS met this goal. Over the life of the charter, the school has maintained a waiting list between 23-54 percent of its enrollment.

Measure 3: A minimum of 90 percent of students will reenroll at the school each year. Of those students who leave, exit interviews will reveal that less than 10 percent left due to dissatisfaction with the school's level of academic expectation, quality of instruction, communication with families or management of student behavior.

SBCS met this goal. Over the life of the charter, over 90 percent of the student re-enrolled each year, and exit interviews indicated that less than 10 percent left due to dissatisfaction as stated in the measure. The majority of families that did not return moved out of the area.

<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p> <p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>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.</p>
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As part of a compliance review, the Institute reviewed steps the school took in response to the New York State Education Department's Third-Year Monitoring Report, which outlined certain instances of non-compliance. The school was either in compliance or was in the process of coming into compliance for most areas noted by the State Education Department including teacher certification and school certificate of occupancy. Based on the records-review conducted during the renewal visit, only two teachers at the school were not certified at least provisionally, which fully complies with the Charter Schools Act. At the time of the State Education Department's visit only 18 of 33 teachers were certified. We also note that the State Education Department has indicated that as of January 28, 2005, the school was only in partial compliance with the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) in that the school safety plan submitted pursuant to Education Law section 2801-a was not complete.¹⁶

While the school had a poor record of compliance early in its charter in terms of submission of information to the Institute, and mixed middle years, its fourth year has been exemplary. On more than one occasion, the school has not been in compliance with the Monitoring Plan in its Charter with respect to notifying the Institute regarding changes in the school's Trustees.

The Board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law and has abided by them. Exceptions were noted in the areas of Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) and Open Meetings Law compliance. While the school has a FOIL policy in its charter, there was no working policy of which employees were aware, nor notice or training regarding FOIL. As a result, parents and staff do not know of access to the full range of available records. The school has not been noticing Board meetings to the media as required by the Open Meetings Law. The school's by-laws also state that school's Trustees can participate in Board meetings by conference call in contravention of the Open Meetings Law. However, there was no evidence that Board members had done so and the Board so stated. An additional Open Meetings Law exception was noted in the Board's minutes, which often did not reflect a reason why the Board entered into executive session.

In terms of legal support, the school has one Board member who is a lawyer and assists in legal matters on a *pro bono* basis. The Board has also retained outside counsel for resolution of transportation issues, and separate outside counsel for disciplinary issues.

¹⁶SBCS submitted a new plan to SED in response to the January 28, 2005 notification of partial compliance.

The Board stated that it quickly realized that its management company would not be able to provide adequate advice on matters of New York State Education Law.

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 by-laws 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 provided effective financial oversight, ensuring that money is available before approving expenditures. From its inception, the Board has included a diverse mix of professionals. The Board does not have an audit or finance committee and as a result acts as a full Board on those issues. A budget committee is established to initiate the budget development process each year. The committee is open to any Board member and meets as much as once or twice a week beginning in December.

The Board's decision to partner with, initially, Beacon Schools provided access to start-up capital and some overall stability. Partnering with Beacon was a key to a successful start-up of the school. A review of a sample of Board minutes noted evidence that the Board was actively involved with oversight of the school's finances. For example, at each Board meeting the Board reviews and approves bills that are to be processed for payment thus providing direct oversight of monies expended and providing transparency to each Board member. The Board has met on a monthly basis to review, among other things, the financial reports and to make decisions on budgeting, staffing, major building repairs, and other financial issues as they arise. This track record of sound oversight should serve the school well as it moves from contracting with a management company to using its own internal business administration office.

The school has deployed its financial resources in an effective manner in order to support its academic programs. It has used grant funds to supplement and enhance the services and learning atmosphere the school provides. The school has followed-up with the billing and collection of all its regular and special revenues in order to maximize the resources to the school. The school has had the benefit of low facility cost due to low rent in its first two years from the City of Buffalo. In the third year, the school purchased the building from the city at a reasonable price. Additionally the local district has administered the school's lunch and breakfast program and part of the school's programs for students with disabilities, thereby reducing the school's overhead to administer these programs while offering them to its students.

<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3B</p> <p>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.</p>
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The school has operated pursuant to long-range plans beginning with the five-year plan included as part of its charter application. Budgets have provided a realistic framework for the school's spending activities and monitoring procedures were and are in place. As a result of the school's prudent planning, surpluses were generated in each of the first four years of its charter. This result is a function of both conservative budgeting and active monitoring of expenses.

The school has relied on its management partner for assistance in developing its annual budget. The budget is monitored on a monthly basis and there is ample evidence of Board discussions and involvement throughout the process. Examples of appropriate budget revisions were also evident in the Board minutes.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>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.</p>
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Based on interviews with staff and review of documentation, the school has established processes and controls related to receipts, payroll, procurement and the safeguarding of assets. The school has relied on its management partner for establishing appropriate financial controls. As the school has separated from its management company, the Board of Trustees has hired a business administrator to manage all business operations of the school. With that change comes the need to review, revise and implement a new set of financial controls. The Institute will continue to monitor the school’s fiscal practices to ensure controls are in place and effectively guide the business operations of the school. Importantly, the school has a system to record fixed assets, but it has not yet established procedures for performing periodic physical inventories.

Management letters were issued by the school’s independent auditors in conjunction with the audits of FY 2002, 2003 and 2004. Comments in FY 2002 and 2003 letters concerned the following topics: cash management, fixed assets, special education revenue, reconciliation of student enrollment income, checking account balance and payroll procedures. The school has taken appropriate steps to address these issues, although the auditor recommended that the school consider using a cash management facility to automatically invest unneeded funds. For FY 2004, the management letter addressed issues concerning what appeared to be isolated issues concerning payroll, student records and a recommendation for a thorough review of the revised policies and procedures related to its accounting functions. These issues have not yet been addressed by the school, but there is no indication they are reluctant to do so.

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 directly with the independent auditors to discuss the financial results.

<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3D</p> <p>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.</p>
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The school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were filed on time with no significant 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.

As noted under Benchmark 3C, the school received management letters for FY 2002, 2003 and 2004. The school eventually has taken, or is exploring, appropriate corrective actions to address the issues raised. Annual audits were conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* as required.

<p>Benchmark 3E</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3E</p> <p>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).</p>
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The school completed the year in strong financial condition. The school had an increase in net assets of \$528,571 and finished with total net assets of \$2.2 million. Overall, the school's cash position improved by \$62,256. The school's operating activities provided positive cash flow of \$581,845, the school invested in the purchase of property and equipment totaling \$353,722 and repaid \$165,867 in debt. Over the first four years of its charter the school received negligible amounts of contributions indicating the school was not dependent on variable income for its financial needs.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$1,387,883 that consists primarily of its building, furniture and equipment. The school purchased the school building from the City of Buffalo in June of 2002. The school has long-term debt totaling just \$10,417 (plus the current portion due of \$62,500).

Renewal Question 4

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

<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Curricular & Assessment Plans</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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During the term of a future charter, SBCS looks to continue serving students in Kindergarten through eighth grade and to utilize the curricular and assessment design in use at the end of its current charter. As indicated by the data available at the end of the school's current charter, SBCS has implemented a program that succeeds at assisting a majority of its students in meeting state performance standards. However, as 2004-05 is the first year the school has instructed students at the eighth grade level, no quantitative data as measured by state or national standardized tests is available. Qualitative evidence gathered at the renewal visit indicates that instruction and student work products at grades seven and eight have yet to reach the level required to have all students meet state standards.

The school has placed mentor teachers in seventh and eighth grades to assist in raising the level of rigor in instruction and student work. The mentors work closely with teachers in planning, modeling and assessing lessons and student work. With continued focus and leadership in improving instruction at upper grades the plans the school presents for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Accountability Plan</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school’s measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</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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South Buffalo Charter School submitted a proposed Accountability Plan with its application for charter renewal. The plan largely follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and is reasonable, feasible, and achievable. Should the school’s charter be renewed by the State University of New York’s Board of Trustees, the Institute will work with the school to finalize this proposed Accountability Plan and incorporate it into a future charter.

The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State’s testing regimen or revisions to the Institute’s Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>School Calendar & Enrollment</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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In its application for renewal, SBCS submitted a sample school calendar that includes a sufficient number of school days and proposed hours of instruction. The school’s enrollment plan is to continue to serve students in grades Kindergarten through eight during the term of a future five-year charter. The school proposes increasing the population of the school by 25 students each year of the next four years to enroll a maximum of 657 students in 2009-10.

<p>Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>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.</p>
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The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period. 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.

The South Buffalo Charter School Board of Trustees submitted an amendment to the school's application for charter renewal on January 25, 2005, that outlines the termination of South Buffalo Charter School's agreement with its management company. From the start of its current charter, South Buffalo Charter School contracted with Beacon Education Management to oversee the operation of the school. Beacon Education Management became Chancellor Beacon Academies in 2003 and Imagine Schools in 2004. While the management company initially provided curricular, assessment, and administrative set up and oversight to South Buffalo Charter School, in the last two years the management company has provided minimal services limited to payroll and other administrative functions. Under the new governance structure, the South Buffalo Charter School Board of Trustees has secured the services of a business administrator who has assumed the financial and statistical reporting for the school. This individual administers the personnel and benefits functions of the school including building and grounds. The school's business administrator holds New York State certification as a business administrator.

The school's fiscal plan includes the assumption that it will remain a Kindergarten through eighth grade school, although the Board may seek an expansion of its educational program to include a high school in the future. The school is assessing whether such expansion could be accomplished in a fiscally, organizationally and academically sound manner. In addition, the Board has contracted the services of an architectural firm to study the utilization of space, as well as possible expansion of the facility through an addition on the back of the school.

The proposed enrollment schedule in the renewal application does not match the fiscal plan. Except in the first year, as shown below, the fiscal plan estimates that paid enrollment will be less than the proposed enrollment schedule. The estimated cost of necessary additional staff is included in the fiscal plan. However, the school has limited capacity to add additional classrooms without incurring substantial costs for renovation or expansion of its current facility. Such costs are not delineated in the fiscal plan. However, should the school choose not to seek such expansion of its facility and keep enrollment at lower levels, it has a structure in place to remain fiscally viable.

Overall the fiscal plan starts with the conservative assumption of per-pupil revenues at \$8,200 per student. Actual FY 2005 per-pupil funding is \$8,245 for Buffalo resident students, the vast majority of school students, and between \$7,156 and \$8,395 for other students. On a cumulative basis, per pupil funding was the same. The plan assumes per

pupil funding increases of three percent per year. Historically, the per-pupil revenue for Buffalo students has been volatile with a 15 percent spike from FY 2001 to FY 2002, and then a see-saw that has left overall funding flat thereafter.

