



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 ROOSEVELT CHILDREN'S ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

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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

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.

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

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?

⁷ See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

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.

- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

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. Recommendations 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 Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School (Roosevelt, the Academy, or RCA) was approved by the State University Trustees in January 2000 and opened in September of that year. The school is located in a newly constructed modular facility at 105 Pleasant Avenue, Roosevelt, New York. First and second grade classes are offered at space leased at the Good Shepard Church, 230 Brookside Avenue, Roosevelt, New York; several blocks from the school facility. The school currently enrolls 299 students in grades one through six.

The mission of the Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School is as follows:

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

Members of the Roosevelt community felt a great need for a public education alternative to the Roosevelt School District, which state laws have placed under special supervision of the State Education Department. The school contracted with Victory Schools, Incorporated for its management. The Victory Schools' curriculum was built on the principle that all children can learn and integrates comprehensive balanced literacy, Core Knowledge, and other curricular components, aligned with state standards. Victory is responsible for curriculum materials, professional development, instructional monitoring, budget development and personnel. Victory curriculum personnel are regular visitors to the school to conduct their instructional oversight functions and maintain close connection with building liaisons responsible for day-to-day operations.

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation:

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for renewal of the Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School and renew the charter of Roosevelt Children's Academy for a period of five years with authority to provide instruction to students in grades Kindergarten through six with a maximum enrollment of 300 for the period that the renewal charter is in effect during the 2004-05 school year, and thereafter to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through eight with a maximum enrollment of 648 students, subject however to the applicable terms of the renewal application and subject to the following additional conditions. Prior to providing instruction to any student in seventh or eighth grade and expanding its enrollment from its current level of 300 students:

- Roosevelt Children's Academy must present a comprehensive facility plan for such grades and a suitable enrollment and fiscal plan to the Charter Schools Institute and the Institute shall have approved such plans; and
- Roosevelt Children's Academy must present a staffing plan for middle school grades that articulates the subject area expertise and experience the school seeks in staffing a middle school program to the Charter Schools Institute and the Institute shall have approved such plan.

Summary Discussion

Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School is located in Roosevelt, Long Island and currently provides instruction to 299 students in grades Kindergarten through six. The school is partnered with Victory Schools, Incorporated, an educational service provider headquartered in New York City, pursuant to a five year contract for comprehensive school management services. The school has applied to the State University Board of Trustees for a full-term charter of five years, pursuant to which it would grow to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through 11.

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

Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, the Institute has determined that Roosevelt has met the standard for a full-term renewal of five years and recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the school's application for such renewal and authorize renewal of the charter, subject to the conditions set forth above and discussed below.

During the initial renewal period, Roosevelt met most but not all of the measures of student academic performance it set for itself in its Accountability Plan. Of particular note, the school performed particularly well on state examinations during this period, exceeding the State Education Commissioner's standard on all the fourth-grade tests. In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade examinations, Roosevelt met its absolute objectives on all three state examinations for fourth graders in 2002-03, and posted a still higher level of performance on the English Language Arts examination in 2003-04 with 84.6 percent of the school's fourth graders passing. This score exceeded the district average by 16 percentage points and places the school in the top tier of all schools in New York State. Eighty-two percent of Roosevelt's fourth graders passed the state's fourth grade mathematics examination, exceeding the average of the Roosevelt Union Free School District by two percent. The school is also in good standing under No Child Left Behind. As a whole, the student achievement data the school has amassed during its first four years of operation indicates that the school has significantly improved student learning and achievement.

At the time of the renewal visit in fall 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. In the school's fourth year, the school identified a strong Principal and has put in place a comprehensive professional development program that has increased the proficiency of the school's faculty. The curriculum is sound and the school employs the Core Knowledge program effectively. In addition, the school has benefited from the consistent leadership of the school's Board of Trustees. The trustees have worked to provide the supports and resources that the school requires to provide a high-quality educational program. The Board has also provided effective oversight of its management company Victory Schools, Incorporated, and the relationship between the company and the Board has been cooperative and effective. With financing from Victory, the school has built a facility that is clean, bright and conducive to educational achievement. The school has maintained overall financial health and the Board and Victory have generally had in place appropriate financial controls and sound financial practices. In sum, the school is a viable and effective organization.

In its application for charter renewal, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School requested approval of a five-year charter allowing the school to serve a maximum of 648 students in Kindergarten through 11th grade. Given the absence of data regarding the strength of a yet-to-be implemented middle school program, the critical importance of ensuring eighth grade students are prepared to succeed in high school, the lack of a sufficiently detailed staffing plan for grades nine through twelve, and the lack of suitable facilities to provide instruction at the high school level (science labs, library resource materials, *etc.*), the Institute does not recommend that the school be allowed to expand to serve students in grades nine through 11 at this time.

The Institute does recommend, based on the school's student assessment outcomes, the Institute's review of the program during its renewal inspection (including review of the school's fiscal and operational systems) and the plans that the school has submitted as part of its renewal application, that the school be authorized to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through eight beginning in the 2005-06 school year with a maximum enrollment of 648 students. As such, the school would be approved to expand from its current Kindergarten through sixth grade configuration. The Institute recommends that authority to expand to provide instruction in grades seven and eight be subject to Roosevelt meeting two conditions.

- Roosevelt would be required to submit a comprehensive facility plan and accompanying enrollment and fiscal plans to the Institute for its review and approval. The Institute recommends this condition given that Roosevelt's current facility plans are not as fully developed as is necessary for the Institute to find them reasonable, feasible and achievable and as the school already is operating in two locations to serve the students and grades it currently has.¹¹ If the Institute's recommendation is adopted, the Institute would work with the school to satisfy this condition.
- Roosevelt would be required to submit to the Institute for its review and approval a staffing plan for middle school grades that articulates the subject area expertise and experience the school seeks in staffing a middle school program. The school's plans for providing instruction in grades seven and eight, as set forth in the charter renewal application, are in general reasonable, feasible and achievable. However, the staffing plan requires more detail. Specifically, the school has yet to, but should be able to, identify the content expertise and educational expertise it will use as criteria to fill middle school staff positions. This is critical, as the New York State Performance Standards for middle school levels requires a richer facility with content knowledge than that demanded in primary grades. If the Institute's recommendation is adopted, the Institute would work with the school to satisfy this condition.

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

¹¹ Roosevelt's Board of Trustees, as noted in the report, has been successful in developing a facility for its current grades—and creative in finding additional space for its Kindergarten and first grade. The school is hampered by the very small size of the district (less than one square mile) and the small amount of open space or viable facilities that could be retro-fitted. As with all charter schools, it also faces the difficulties inherent in building a facility while having no access to public funding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

- Finding 1: Over the life of the charter, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School strengthened its curriculum and internal assessment systems. The curriculum is comprehensive and aligned with state standards. The internal assessment system is used to improve instruction. There are additional opportunities to maximize the internal assessment system, and the school has identified ways to do so.*
- Finding 2: The staff's effectiveness in conveying skills and knowledge is generally sufficient and occasionally outstanding. The faculty's efficient use of instructional time is notable.*
- Finding 3: The school is safe and orderly. As a general matter student discipline promotes calm, safe classrooms where students participate fully in learning activities and are not distracted from academic progress.*
- Finding 4: The school's leadership has the support and respect of students, parents, teachers and the Board. Leadership in the areas of internal assessments, professional development, and community relations serves the school well.*

At the end of the term of its current charter, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School has met most of its key academic outcome measures. This analysis is based on data that is somewhat limited insofar as the school administered state examinations only in the last two years of its four and a half years of operation. During this period, the school performed particularly well on state examinations, exceeding the State Education Commissioner's standard on all the fourth-grade tests.

In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade examinations, Roosevelt has met the criterion of success set in its outcome measures. After meeting its absolute objectives on all three state examinations for fourth graders in 2002-03, Roosevelt posted a still higher level of performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) examination in 2003-04 with 84.6 percent of the school's fourth graders passing. This score exceeded the district average by 16 percentage points. Eighty-two percent of RCA's fourth graders passed the state's fourth grade mathematics examination exceeding the average of the Roosevelt Union Free School District by two percent.

To gauge academic success by measuring year-to-year achievement (the "value" the school provides the children it enrolls), RCA administers the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). This test is a nationally normed standardized achievement test administered to hundreds of thousands of students across the United States. RCA posts mixed results in achieving its value-added ITBS English Language

Arts and mathematics scores according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the ITBS Test in the three years for which data are available.

Together, the value-added data posted at the school indicates generally positive progress in increasing the value the school's academic program provides to students. In Total Reading, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring declined in all three years, though the school is posting a trend of diminishing declines in each successive year. In Total Math, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring declined in the first year and increased in the second and third year. Roosevelt met the goal of its value-added outcome measure in math during the last two years. Indeed, the school made substantial progress in mathematics in 2003-04 with a gain of almost nine NCEs. Aside from the year-to-year gains on the ITBS test, Roosevelt cohorts in 2003-04 showed some strong results, with students scoring on average at the 54th percentile in reading and the 65th percentile in math.

Roosevelt Children's Academy has built, over the life of the charter, a solid academic environment where achievement and class participation are expected and valued. In the first three years of the school's charter, the school used a detailed English Language Arts and mathematics curriculum that provided teachers with exacting and detailed lesson plans and a set of internal school assessments to assist in both instruction and tracking student progress toward academic goals. During its fourth year, RCA, having determined that its original curriculum insufficiently served to assist students in acquiring the basic skills necessary for academic advancement, decided to modify its curriculum to further enhance student performance, especially as to students' acquisition of higher-order thinking skills.

At the time of the visit, the new curriculum and accompanying set of internal assessments were in place. The curriculum in place at the time of renewal remains aligned with state standards, and evidence of its implementation is strong. In the last two years the school has benefited from the knowledge and skills of a new Principal who demonstrates not only administrative competence but sustains a focus on quality instruction and academic achievement. The school's teachers work diligently to plan instruction linked to state standards and to provide lessons that allow students to meet those standards.

Roosevelt Children's Academy has created a school culture where students display behavior that promotes an academically focused environment. As physical facility limitations situate primary classes in an open environment prone to higher than expected levels of noise, teachers and students work well together to remain focused on the learning tasks at hand. Observations during the renewal visit produced evidence that students are generally enthusiastic and attentive to instruction. The student discipline code of conduct is sufficient as written and implemented. The school's leader and teachers have put in place a culture that consistently promotes academics.

2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

- Finding 1: The school's Board of Trustees has provided leadership and effective oversight during the term of the school's first charter. The Board understands the school's mission and the high expectations it embodies and takes steps to see that it will be accomplished.*
- Finding 2: A strong sense of collaboration and mission on the part of teachers has been instrumental in sustaining the school through the challenges it faced during the term of the current charter. This commitment to collaboration and mission is a positive indicator of a viable and effective organization.*
- Finding 3: The school's record of compliance has improved over time. The school is now in substantial compliance with its charter and applicable laws.*
- Finding 4: Parent and student satisfaction is strong and student enrollment and retention rates are a notable reflection of the high levels of satisfaction with the school's program.*

Roosevelt Children's Academy's Board of Trustees remains faithful to the mission of the school and has served students well with focus in increased academic achievement during the term of this charter. Core members of the school's original Board join with new members and consistently take actions that bolster the academic achievement of students enrolled at the school. This is particularly true in the fourth and fifth year of the school's charter. Through the leadership of the Board and the school's current Principal, the school has successfully worked with their educational management company, Victory Schools, to build its instructional program and provide parents with a welcome choice in public education. The school is fully enrolled and boasts a waiting list of 60 percent of its total enrollment.

At the time of renewal, the school's teachers and Principal demonstrate commitment to creating a school where all students meet or exceed state standards. Teachers carefully plan instruction, link expectations for student work to state standards, and constantly seek opportunities for improvement and excellence. The school had three different Principals in its first three years. In its fourth and fifth year, the school has benefited from the consistent leadership and commitment of its current Principal.

Parents and students report large measures of satisfaction with the school. Parents cite small class sizes, relationships with teachers, school security, relatively high quality of teaching and learning, recent changes in curriculum and achieved Principal stability, and teachers' concern for students as a few of the reasons they selected RCA for their students' education. Parents express a strong desire for a school facility that situates the school in one location and includes a gym, science lab, and increased access to educational technology.

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 fair financial condition. Its financial condition is improving and while it has not always operated on a balanced budget, it has never experienced an operating cash shortfall.

Over the life of the Roosevelt Children's Academy 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 never experienced an operating cash shortfall due to an agreement with Victory Schools whereby a portion of the management and central service fees are deferred.

The school has generally 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: In its application for charter renewal, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School submitted academic plans for the term of a next charter that include expansion from the current grades one through six enrolling 299 students to serving grades Kindergarten through 11 with a maximum of 648 students. The Institute finds the written curriculum meets the requirements of the New York State Performance Standards.¹²

Finding 2: The school has established a solid foundation for being a viable fiscal entity for the term of a future charter.

Finding 3: The school has provided an optimistic five-year fiscal plan concerning expansion of the school in the term of a future charter.

¹² 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.

Measured by qualitative and quantitative data at the end of the term of the current charter, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School is like to continue to improve learning and achievement for the students it serves in grades one through six. Though the curriculum presented for Kindergarten through 11th grade meets the demands of New York State Performance, the school did not present a staffing plan sufficient to serve students in grades seven through eleven. The staffing plan included in the application identifies one teacher for each grade level and is void of the content expertise the school will seek in staffing any future grades.

The school's expansion plans hinge on its ability to locate a suitable facility. The school is currently situated in two locations approximately a mile apart. This current facility set up provides for instruction in grades one through six, with first and second grade located in an open area church basement. While the school has made modifications to help ameliorate the inherent distraction from having four classrooms in a large open area, the facility situation is hardly ideal. The school's second facility, housing students in grades three through six is barely sufficient for the grades currently served as space is at a premium in the small building and students have no access to an enclosed area for play or physical education and no access to science labs. The school's ability to provide the required curriculum in the upper middle school grades is challenged by its current facility situation.

The school's application for renewal does not present definite facility plans. While the school has attempted to acquire additional space, or land on which to build, at the time of renewal it has not been able to do so.

At the end of this charter period, the school is in fair and improving financial position attributable to its financial restraint and increased per-pupil revenue. The Institute finds that the school's financial position during the term of a future charter should continue to stabilize and strengthen assuming the continued demand for enrollment in the school.

The school's expansion plans hinge on obtaining sufficient funding for its facility plans. The Board is committed to locating its facility within the confines of the Roosevelt community. While not an insurmountable challenge, this does limit the potential locations for expansion given the small geographic footprint of the community.

The school's vision of a Kindergarten through grade 12 school is not entirely supported by its facility plans. The main location of the school, even after expansion, will be too small to accommodate all the students in the enrollment plan for the last year of the proposed new charter.

Although a seemingly ample cushion is built into the fiscal plan, the school's assumptions are optimistic related to the cost of facility expansion and staffing. Such optimism is supported in part by the relatively high per-pupil funding to which the school is entitled. For example, the school's per-pupil funding for students that reside in the Roosevelt City School District is 29 percent higher than the per-pupil funding for students residing in the New York City School District.

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.

Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School has met most of its academic outcome measures. These results are based on somewhat limited data insofar as it has administered state examinations in only the last two years of its four years of operation. During these two years, the school has performed particularly well on state examinations, exceeding the State Education Commissioner's standard on all the fourth-grade tests.

In its absolute level of performance on the fourth grade examinations, Roosevelt has met the criterion of success set in its outcome measures. After having met its absolute objectives on all three state examinations for fourth graders in 2002-03, Roosevelt posted

still higher levels of performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics examinations in 2003-04.

In its comparative level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, Roosevelt has generally outperformed the Roosevelt Union Free School District it identified as its comparison in its Accountability Plan. In 2002-03, the percent of fourth-grade Roosevelt students scoring at the proficient level on the state's ELA exam was lower than the percent for the district; however, because of a substantial increase in the percent of students scoring at the proficient level in 2003-04, the school was able to outperform the district. In 2002-03, the percent of fourth-grade Roosevelt students scoring at the proficient level on the state's math exam was slightly lower than that of the district; in 2003-04, the school was slightly higher. Roosevelt outperformed the district in science in 2002-03. Science results for 2003-04 data are not available.

Results have been mixed on the value-added to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the ITBS Test in the three years for which data are available. In Total Reading, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring declined in all three years,¹³ though the declines have been less steep in each successive year. In Total Math, the average score of each cohort from spring-to-spring declined in the first year and increased in the second and third year. Roosevelt met the goal of its value-added outcome measure in math during the last two years. Indeed, the school made substantial progress in mathematics in 2003-04 with a gain of almost nine NCEs. Aside from the year-to-year gains on the ITBS test, Roosevelt cohorts in 2003-04 showed some strong results, with students scoring on average at the 54th percentile in reading and the 65th percentile in math.

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

Overall, the results indicate that most Roosevelt students are being prepared for middle school by virtue of the proportion who are scoring proficient on the fourth grade state examinations. These results indicate that the academic program has had success, especially in mathematics. However, the value-added data also show that the instructional program has not enabled students to make consistent progress across the grades in reading.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, Roosevelt Children's Academy 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

¹³ In its renewal application, Roosevelt reports a gain in the average score of cohorts when calculating fall to spring results within the same school year. Typically, fall to spring gains are greater than those for spring-to-spring, because of a summer fall-off in scores and initial unfamiliarity with the test. In order to track students' achievement more seamlessly over time, longitudinal comparisons from spring-to-spring are preferred.

following tables indicate the specific outcomes Roosevelt set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹⁴

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

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

Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	The Academy's "Performance Index" (SPI) on the New York State English Language Arts Assessment (calculated to include only those students enrolled for two or more years) will meet or exceed State Standards, SPI=150 , for public school performance during each year of the charter.	4	No students in grade	No students in grade	155	185
Math	The Academy's "Performance Index" (SPI) on the New York State Mathematics Assessment (calculated to include only those students enrolled for two or more years) will meet or exceed State Standards, SPI=150 , for public school performance during each year of the charter.	4	No students in grade	No students in grade	175	182
Science	The Academy will meet or exceed all State Standards for public school performance on the New York State Science Assessment that may be established by the Commissioner of Education: 40 percent of students will score at state designated mastery level	4	No students in grade	No students in grade	80.0	N/A
Social Studies	The Academy will meet or exceed all State Standards* for public school performance on the New York State Social Studies Assessment that may be established by the Commissioner of Education.	5	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	89.5

*The state has not yet established a standard.

¹⁴ Please note: since Roosevelt has had a fourth grade for two years, it administered the state examinations for the first time in 2002-03. Social studies and science test scores are not available for 2003-04. As 2000-01 was the school's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year.

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	A greater percentage of Academy students enrolled in the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State ELA Assessment than will students at the Roosevelt Union Free School District.	4	Roosevelt	No students in grade	No students in grade	60.0	84.6
			UFSD	N/A	N/A	69.3	68.5
Math	A greater percentage of Academy students enrolled in the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Mathematics Assessment than will students at the Roosevelt Union Free School District.	4	Roosevelt	No students in grade	No students in grade	75.0	82.0
			UFSD	N/A	N/A	79.0	79.8
Science	A greater percentage of Academy students enrolled in the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment than will students at the Roosevelt Union Free School District.	4	Roosevelt	No students in grade	No students in grade	80.0	N/A
			UFSD	N/A	N/A	65.0	N/A
Social Studies	A greater percentage of Academy students enrolled in the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Social Students Assessment than will students at the Roosevelt Union Free School District.	5	Roosevelt	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	89.5
			UFSD	N/A	N/A	N/A	92.0

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	Each cohort of Academy students will improve their reading skills by an average of 3 percentiles per year in national rank, according to the reading battery of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Cohorts will include the scores of all eligible students in grades K-6 (Results reported in NCEs)	All	N/A	(-4.1)	(-2.4)	(-0.6)
Math	Each cohort of the Academy will improve their math skills by an average of 3 percentiles per year in national rank, according to the math battery of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Cohorts will include the scores of all eligible students in grades K-6. (Results reported in NCEs)	All	N/A	(-8.1)	3.0	8.6

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states Roosevelt'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

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Science	60 percent of students enrolled at the Academy for will perform at or above grade level on the science section of the Core Knowledge-Curriculum Reference Test, administered to grade 1-6 every other year.	2-5	N/A	N/A	The validity and reliability of the assessment can not be determined.	
Social Studies	60 percent of students enrolled at the Academy for will perform at or above grade level on the history and geography section of the Core Knowledge-Curriculum Reference Test, administered to grade 1-6 every other year.	2-5	N/A	N/A	The validity and reliability of the assessment can not be determined.	

<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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The school's original internal assessment design utilized Direct Instruction for both reading and mathematics. Implementation of Direct Instruction¹⁵ curriculum includes a prescribed series of individual student assessments that track students' attainment of knowledge and skills as they progress through a series of lessons. During the early years of its charter, RCA used this system of assessments to track student progress toward academic goals. Student performance on the Direct Instruction assessments was recorded, aggregated, and analyzed by staff with assistance from curriculum experts from Victory Schools, the school's education management company. Using the data from this internal assessment system and state assessment results, the school analyzed its curriculum model, determined the need for greater content and rigor in its curriculum and adopted the Scott Foresman reading program and Everyday Mathematics. Both programs provide unit assessments that teachers use to evaluate student performance.

While ample evidence exists that the school examines student work products, student performance on unit tests, individual reading records, and standardized test results, the examination of this data has yet to combine into a detailed system of internal assessment. The school uses the Peabody Individual Assessment Test (PIAT), DIBBLES (which measures reading comprehension and fluency), and assessments included with the Scott Foresman and Everyday Mathematics curriculum now used at the school. Victory

¹⁵ Information on the Direct Instruction curriculum can be found at the National Institute for Direct Instruction's web site: <http://www.nifdi.org/>.

Schools provides the school with unit tests based on the Core Knowledge curriculum in social studies and science. The school's Principal continues to work with staff to refine and align the use of internal assessment data to ensure continued increases in student academic success.

The school has designed an "Instructional and Assessment Calendar" and a "Pacing Guide and Assessment Calendar" for every subject area and grade level in the school. This outline/schedule enables every teacher to remain on target in regards to how they longitudinally instruct and assess students. This tool promotes collaboration between teachers by ensuring that they are generally on the same page and facilitating instructional planning. The Principal receives data monthly from individual teachers in the form of a grid requiring teachers to break down and compare various skills tested on the multiple assessments used at the school. Teachers, the Principal, and representatives from Victory Schools meet to analyze individual student learning needs. Some teachers use this analysis to group students for instruction.

The strongest indication of the school's use of internal assessments comes from RCA's students. During renewal visit interviews, students at the upper grade levels were articulate in describing the school's writing program and the rubrics teachers use to gauge student achievement. Expressing a preference for the 4, 3, 2, 1 (instead of A, B, C, *etc.*) grade structure, students indicated an understanding of the demands of high quality written work.

A review of student written work, teacher comments included on student work, and the use of portfolios across the school reveals inconsistencies in the school's use of internal assessments and an inconsistent demand for the quality of work expected of students. What teachers call portfolios are inconsistent between classes at each grade level across the school. Teachers were unable to articulate a common grade level or school-wide purpose for the collection of student work products identified as portfolios. While teachers use rubrics in writing, the school does not include in its internal assessment activities the use of rubrics that present a consistent measure of achievement against the demands of state standards. Comments provided by teachers on student work products reviewed during the renewal visit were cursory in nature, missing opportunities to provide a consistent layering of specific and high quality expectations for student work. For example, a random selection of portfolios examined in five classrooms in grades three through six revealed unfinished assignments with incomplete correction. While some selections were void of any teacher comment or indication of score, when teacher comments/corrections were observed, they frequently failed to point out misspellings or mechanical mistakes. Written assignments posted in classrooms and hallways included similar uncorrected errors. In more than a few classrooms student work products in social studies and science included grades for content only, indicating again that teachers miss critical opportunities to demand a consistent and high quality level of student work.

One potentially promising practice the school has implemented is the use of what the school terms "Power Objectives." A list of discrete, measurable skills and knowledge that students must acquire to succeed in meeting standards, Power Objectives come in the form of an easily accessible list of must-learns for each grade level that are described in short, meaningful ways for teachers to use. Teachers use Power Objectives in planning instruction and at grade-level meetings in planning units. Some teachers displayed familiarity with the Power Objectives required for all grade levels suggesting that teachers have a powerful understanding of what students in their class must achieve in order to find success in later years. Though renewal visitors found no evidence indicating the school does so, renewal visitors found the Power Objectives a potential format for the precise documentation of student progress toward state standards.

The school's Principal collects and maintains an impressive volume of information on student achievement. This information is analyzed in meetings between teachers, the school's Principal, and representatives from Victory Schools. It was not clear to renewal visitors that the assessment information is readily translated into improved classroom instruction in a systemic way.

Roosevelt communicates to parents the assessment data through report cards, formal parent/teacher conferences and informal communications with parents that occur at the beginning and end of the school day. Teachers and parents reported no consistent form(s) of communication regarding student academic progress between report cards. Some teachers reported sending home weekly reports of academic and behavioral achievement but this practice was not widespread or consistent throughout the school.

<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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As documented in annual visit reports generated over the life of the school’s charter, Roosevelt Children’s Academy implemented a defined curriculum – a set of essential knowledge and skills - that students are expected to achieve. This curriculum included Direct Instruction in both reading and mathematics and the use of Core Knowledge to supplement in the areas of world and United States history, literature, and science. To enhance instruction in English Language Arts, the school also implemented a balanced literacy approach that includes challenging literature selections as well as focused writing instruction.

Despite initial success with this curriculum, in the third year of the school’s charter RCA examined data on student achievement and determined the use of Direct Instruction for reading and mathematics instruction was beneficial to some students but did not provide the desired challenge or rigor of material necessary to prepare students to meet state standards. As such, the school reviewed possible curricular options and chose to supplement the Direct Instruction curriculum with the use of Scott Foresman reading materials and the University of Chicago’s Everyday Mathematics Program. While Direct Instruction strategies and materials are still used to provide foundational skills to students who require additional assistance, the school has implemented the new reading and mathematics curriculum.

This new curriculum, as set forth in the application, includes a balanced literacy approach comprised of the following elements:

- a two and one-half hour block of instruction in English Language Arts for all students,
- the Scott Foresman Reading Program,
- the readers’ and writers’ workshop from the National Writing Project and the Great Source Writing Program,¹⁶
- the use of children’s literature books to augment the Scott Foresman Reading Program,
- new student pre-assessment using ITBS and/or another screening program,
- unit and end-of-year tests, and
- a phonics and phonemic awareness program to support basic reading skills.

The University of Chicago’s Everyday Mathematics program matches the demands of state performance standards. Given the school’s scores on the most recent administration of the New York State fourth grade mathematics examination, 82 percent passing, the implementation of the curriculum shows early promise. Research on the effectiveness of the school’s Kindergarten through fifth grade mathematics curriculum (Everyday

¹⁶ Additional information on the National Writing Project can be found at <http://www.writingproject.org>. Information on the Great Source Writing Program is available at www.gswp.org.

Mathematics) shows some evidence of its ability to increase student achievement on state tests in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Florida.¹⁷ This research is tempered, however by the findings in studies reported by New York University that students experiencing mathematics instruction using the Everyday Mathematics curriculum should receive supplemental instruction in learning and memorizing the algorithms (basic mathematical operations and facts) critical to computational and problem solving success.¹⁸

The school uses the Core Knowledge Scope and Sequence to define its curriculum in social studies and science. Student performance on state social studies and science examinations (detailed in Benchmark 1A) provide early indication, as two years of scores are currently available, that these curricular areas are preparing students to meet state standards.

¹⁷ This research was conducted and reported by S.R.A. International, the publisher of Everyday Mathematics, and was downloaded on December 5, 2003 at:

<http://www.sraonline.com/index.php/home/curriculumsolutions/mathematics/emfirstedition/studentachievement/729>

¹⁸ See www.math.nyu.edu

<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>

Reports on the school generated by the Charter School Institute over the life of the school’s charter show that classroom instruction, the path through which curriculum becomes knowledge and skills retained by the students, has varied. At the time of the renewal visit, the quality and level of classroom instruction was sufficient to prepare most students to succeed on state standards. While effective instruction is not yet ubiquitous at RCA, teachers take pride in instruction and, generally speaking, work diligently and extensively on areas in need of improvement. Effective teaching and learning are clearly valued and supported and the school environment is positive and unequivocally recognizes student and staff accomplishments.

During the three-day renewal visit, classroom observations revealed much use of whole class instruction using the curriculum materials chosen by the school. As the renewal visit occurred early in the school year and RCA teachers are in the second year of implementing the reading and mathematics curriculum, renewal visitors believed teachers were consistently faithful in implementing the curriculum as written and were at a stage of implementation that warranted faithfulness to the materials presented in teachers’

manuals. The school's Principal identified the need to build teacher facility with a variety of instructional and grouping strategies, but was proceeding carefully to ensure effective implementation of the current programs did not diminish and that teachers were not overwhelmed by demands to implement too many new instructional strategies at one time.

Some RCA teachers have "looped" with the same set of students for a period of two or three years. Looping is a practice that structures the school so that the teacher remains with the same class of students over a period of years. While looping frequently diminishes the loss of instructional time to establishing new routines and expectations at the beginning of each school year and can provide a rich and rigorous relationship between instructor and student, it requires teachers to master standards of quality and content of greater breadth and depth than required by teaching one grade level to different students year after year. Some of the most effective instruction observed at the school occurred in classrooms with teachers that looped with the students. This may be a result of the renewal visit occurring early in the school year and exemplary of one of the benefits of looping; little time is lost to establishing expectations and routines.

Additional effective instructional strategies observed during the renewal visit included combining effective strategies from the school's previous curriculum (Direct Instruction) with the strategies of the new curriculum. For example, when lessons involved speed and memorization of mathematical facts or review of vocabulary in reading, many teachers displayed facility with using instructional cues outlined in Direct Instruction with the richer curriculum offered by Scott Foresman. Teachers consistently noted for students the standards and learning objectives for lessons, and each classroom had an outline of activities and work for the day posted as students entered the room. Teachers organized their lessons and provided students organizational strategies for learning and for task accomplishment. Institute visitors also observed many teachers who routinely pressed student comprehension toward higher-order thinking skills.

Observations also revealed many teachers who routinely teach across disciplines by reinforcing reading vocabulary when appropriate in math and in one instance challenged students to perform mathematical projections in social studies. In one fourth-grade math class, students were asked to transition "promptly," told that they could be given an "impromptu" assignment, and warned that they shouldn't "procrastinate." In each instance students were asked to define these terms and expect to see and hear them in the near future. The teacher later informed an Institute visitor that the terms were not from any one particular lesson. It was her belief that if she could introduce students to challenging vocabulary regularly their chance of success in meeting English Language Arts standards was increased.

Renewal visitors also observed instances of less effective instruction. For example, one teacher posed the question "What is a diary?" when she really wanted to know what type of documentary source a diary represented, primary or secondary. As a result, a very simple query had students flummoxed for five minutes. Similarly, another teacher informed students that she would allow them to discuss a problem amongst themselves "for a second." This lack of specificity created further confusion.

In every classroom, visitors saw partially edited student work with final grades. Because this work lacked the policing of minor details, renewal visitors found it did not reflect the type of high expectations for student writing outlined in its charter. This is not to say, however, that students are not aware of a credible writing standard or that they do not encounter a wide range of genres. Posted student work in one fifth-grade class revealed evidence of students rendering expository narratives, first-person prose, and creative verse in a competent manner. Furthermore, during an interview with fourth graders, at least 90 percent of the students interviewed could explain the evaluative grading criteria

for the numeric rubric used in English Language Arts and showed little difficulty when asked to assess the work of their peers.

The school has a variety of strategies to meet the needs of students at-risk of academic failure. The school has a Saturday program for students identified as at-risk through performance on the administration of the ITBS. To prepare fourth grade students for success on the state's English Language Arts examination, the school partnered with a local tutoring service. The school also has a reading resource teacher who works with at-risk students. At-risk students receive an individual academic intervention plan that outlines specific strategies and skills teachers use to boost achievement in areas of deficiency. Finally, the Scott Foresman reading curriculum provides plans for differentiated instruction to challenge students already at standards and to ameliorate academic deficiencies of at-risk students. At the time of renewal, classroom observations revealed weak implementation of this resource.

The school employs a full time Title I teacher and special education teacher and has an established process to identify students in need of academic support. The process relies primarily on the results of the spring administration of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). When students new to the school enter in the fall, the school administers the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT). If a student scores one grade level below his or her current placement, the student receives Title I support. A major focus of this support is English Language Arts and mathematics. Students receive additional services in the classroom or a separate area of the school depending upon student needs and the space available in the school. Communication between the Title I staff and classroom teachers ensures that students receive additional academic support.

The school currently has seven (7) students identified who need and are provided with English language learner supports.

<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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Based on a review of teacher certification and observations during the renewal visits, RCA’s instructional staff is somewhat qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter but does not yet consistently reflect the instructional prowess necessary to create one of the finest public schools in America.

In terms of the number of non-certified teachers, the school was in compliance but at the statutory limit -- out of 15 teachers, four had no state certification and one was in the process of applying for certification. (The state Education Law allows only one-third or five non-certified instructors, whichever is less). In addition, the number of permanently certified teachers equaled the number of provisionally certified teachers working toward permanent certification.

One third of staff members have less than three years of teaching experience and have little experience in teaching at their current grade level assignment. In addition to limited experience in teaching generally and at grade level specifically, renewal visitors noted some staff members possessed limited writing and mathematics skills suggesting staff development needs exist in both instructional skill and content knowledge. During the renewal visit one teacher included written directions on the Board that included grammatical errors despite knowing renewal visitors were scheduled to observe that day. Classroom observations and reviews of teacher documents revealed this situation was not consistent, but clearly present in more than one classroom. Interviews and observations also revealed limited technology skills and minimal knowledge of combining technology and instruction on the part of the RCA staff.

As the RCA model requires collaboration in planning instruction between teachers, ensuring competence in subject matter as well as its delivery is critical to the school creating and sustaining a successful academic program. While the school’s Principal visits classrooms and observes instruction frequently, working with teachers to improve their practice, fully creating the kind of school envisioned in the school’s charter requires moving these teachers’ skills from partially sufficient to proficient.

<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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Classrooms and hallways at RCA are largely energetic and academically focused spaces. Consistent discipline, the presence of a teacher and assistant in each classroom, and the Principal’s practice of visiting each classroom daily create a school environment where disruptions to the learning process are minimized. In interviews during the renewal visit students clearly articulated behavioral expectations and a sense of academic focus in the classrooms.

The school included the following goals regarding student order and discipline in its Accountability Plan:

Goal II: Students at the Roosevelt Children’ Academy Charter school will demonstrate strength of character and concern for others by participation in class-wide and community-based civics projects and by demonstrating appropriate classroom and school-wide behavior.

Measure 3: Seventy percent of regular classroom teachers will rate classroom and school-wide behavior as “good” or excellent” (on a scale of “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “poor”).

The school gathered two years of data on this measure though the indicators included on the survey indicators varied from those written in the original measure listed above. Nevertheless, in 2003-04, 78.57 percent of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with student demonstrated self-control, responsibility and concern for others, up more than 25 percent from the prior year. Teacher dissatisfaction with behavior dropped significantly from 50 to 7.14 percent. The school’s renewal application does point out that the current staff is composed primarily of new, inexperienced teachers and that the school plans additional professional development opportunities to ensure behavior promotes rigorous academic achievement.

Measure 4: Seventy percent of participants in a Parent Task Force will evaluate overall student behavior at the Academy as “good” or excellent” (on a scale of “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “poor”). Parent Task Force members will receive training on an evaluation rubric, and will observe classroom and school-wide activities during one full day each fall and spring.

According to interviews and the school’s application for renewal, nineteen Parent Task Force members participated in this process. In the fall, 95 percent of the Parent Task Force answered positively with 94.29 percent responding positively in the spring.

<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>

Working with Victory Schools, RCA’s Principal guides the professional development program at the school. A frequent visitor to classrooms, RCA’s Principal works with individual teachers, grade level teams, and the school as a whole to improve instruction. Teachers receive formal professional development opportunities in the weeks prior to the opening of school each year as well as at intervals throughout the school year. Most recently, professional development focused on gaining proficiency with Scott Foresman reading and Everyday Mathematics.

Less formal professional development occurs during regular grade level meetings and is provided by the school’s Principal and staff developers from Victory Schools. Teachers report opportunities to attend additional professional development classes outside of those provided at the school and laud the Principal’s willingness to support their desire to become better instructors. At interviews during the renewal visit, teachers reported feeling supported by the school’s Principal.

The school’s management company, Victory Schools provides the RCA Principal with teacher professional development. This includes a Professional Development Needs Assessment that teachers complete and return to the Principal, a lesson observation and discussion protocol, as well as an Action Plan and Monthly Calendar Dates for professional development activities. Victory also provides the school with an analysis of student test scores and documents that describe using test score analysis to inform and

augment instruction. The goal of the professional development protocol is to “foster self-learning among all members of the staff...and a framework for supporting a community of learners within the school.”¹⁹

The school’s teacher evaluation protocol rates teachers on a three-point scale in demonstration of content knowledge, use of a variety of teaching methods and resources, communication with students, student assessment techniques, classroom management, professional and collegial relations, instructional planning, and professional development. In addition to formal teacher evaluation, the RCA Principal visits all classrooms and observes instruction on a daily basis. Feedback on these visits is informal and the Principal works informally with teachers to improve instructional abilities on a regular basis.

Teachers generally reported the professional development opportunities at the school as one of its strengths and complemented the Principal for the consistent support she provides in classrooms. Teachers at the primary grades did express the desire for professional development focused with greater specificity at the needs of instructing younger students. Observations by renewal visitors provide additional evidence that primary grade teachers would benefit from professional development focused specifically on developing consistent instructional expertise at those grade levels.

Finally, renewal visitors concur with the Principal’s assessment that teachers have been asked, over the last two years of the school’s charter, to “drink from a fire hose” of demands for improvement. The school’s Principal has provided a sense of stability and support to the teachers and must balance that with a continued urgency to improve academic results for every student at the school.

¹⁹ Victory Schools’ Operational Memo #42

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.**

Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School included the following school specific, non-academic goals in its Accountability Plan for the term of its current charter:

Goal I: Students at Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School will develop knowledge and appreciation of art and music.

Measure 1: In a yearly survey distributed to all parents, 70 percent of parents responding will report that the Academy has done a “good” or “excellent” job in improving their child’s knowledge and appreciation of art and music (on a scale of “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “poor”).

The school reports not meeting, but making progress toward, this goal. Positive parent survey responses to this question dropped from 77 percent to 64 percent over the life of the charter. A change in the scale used in the school’s survey format during the term of the charter makes it difficult to compare this data over the term of this charter. The renewal application reports the incorporation of art and music into core learning activities but visitors were unable to gather sufficient evidence of this during the renewal visit. The school acknowledges that there must be more work to involve and inform parents of the various programs at the school.

Goal II: Students at the Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School will demonstrate strength of character and concern for others by participation in class-wide and community-based civics projects and by demonstrating appropriate classroom and school-wide behavior.

Measure 1: Ninety percent of students in the Academy will participate in civic projects that improve their knowledge of their community as measured by their writing and demonstration activities reflected in student journals and class-wide portfolios developed for all major project activities. A portfolio of exemplary activities and projects suitable to demonstrate school-wide excellence in this area will be presented in the accountability progress report.

Renewal visitors found little evidence of a robust civic or community focus in any portfolios examined. According to the renewal application, RCA students participated in school-wide activities including canned food drives, aide to the homeless, Earth Day and other civic projects.

Measure 2: Seventy percent of parents who respond each year will report that their child’s growth in responsibility, self control and concern for others has been “good” or excellent” (on a scale of “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “poor”).

The school has met this target over the life of the charter, with 92 percent of parents responding positively in the most recent survey. The survey return response, however, was only 47.7 percent, the highest response rate over the life of the charter.

<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 Board of the school was able in an interview to articulate the mission of the school and indicated that the success of the school in meeting its mission was largely dependent on the school’s success in meeting its academic goals. As set forth more fully in the discussion of Benchmark 2C.1-2C.2, the governance practices of the school reflect the mission of high academic achievement. The Board has taken consistent actions to bolster academic achievement, including providing such resources for which the school Director has asked. This is particularly true in the fourth and fifth year of the charter.

As outlined in the renewal application, the school has faithfully implemented most of the key elements of its charter including its curriculum and management model, providing a longer school day and school year, and setting forth the policies and procedures included in its original charter application.

The facility challenges facing the school required it to diminish the number of students it originally hoped to serve. The school still faces the challenge of locating a suitable existing structure or land on which to build a structure capable of housing the students it hopes to enroll in the term of a future charter.

<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>

The Board of the school and the school’s administration have deployed resources effectively to further the educational mission of the school. The Board was able to articulate specific actions it had taken in this regard, including; requiring the curriculum to be strengthened and aligned with state standards, instituting more professional development during the summer, and providing resources for added staff positions as needed. The administrative team made clear that they felt supported by the Board. The Principal reported that she and the Chair of the Board are in constant contact, and that, indeed, the Board Chair calls every day to ask what resources and actions the Board could take in order to permit the school to meet its mission. Teachers also voiced their strong sense of support from the Board: “Whatever we need, we get.” The Board and Director did make clear that requests for additional resources were met favorably but not without close questioning regarding need and cost.

In the interview with the Board, the members made clear that the mission of the school was high academic achievement and that excuses were not acceptable. As one Board member put it: “Doing as well as the district was not an option. We created this school to

do better, far better, than the district and we will not be satisfied unless it does.” Others echoed this sentiment, noting that the benchmark was how well the school did compared to Long Island’s most affluent and high-performing districts. Several Board members noted that the single biggest achievement was finding the right leader; and that the Board had accomplished this with the present leader now in place.

In addition, the Board has taken as a priority working with the management company to see that the school gets the services that it has contracted for. As an example, a Board member noted that professional development for teachers had increased, a fact confirmed by the Director, interviews with the management company and teachers, as well as a review of relevant documents.

The Board also has an evaluation process for school leadership. Though not as formalized as might be ideal, the Board has been aware of deficiencies in past school leaders and has set goals and standards for the present Director, which have been communicated clearly with her.

During the first charter period, the Board has been largely stable, with a core of four members who have been on the Board since the application was filed in 1999. The Board has clear criteria for selecting new members and has been deliberate in making those selections.

Based on available evidence and statements by Board members, few if any conflicts-of-interest have emerged during the charter period and the Board has a conflict-of-interest policy in place. In addition, it would appear from interviews and Board minutes that the Board operates pursuant to its by-laws and applicable law.

Based on a review of the Board minutes as well as interviews with the Board and school leadership, the Board members regularly solicit the opinion and feedback of the administrative team and teachers. In addition, parents and staff are afforded an opportunity to address the Board at the Board’s meetings.

<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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At interviews during the renewal visit, Roosevelt Children’s Academy parents expressed strong support for the school, clearly articulating its mission and praising its teachers and leaders for providing RCA as making public school choice a reality. Parents cited frequent communication from teachers and the academic opportunities provided for their children as important in the decision to choose RCA for their children. During the interview the parents expressed enthusiasm for the school’s requested growth to serve students in grades Kindergarten through 11th grade.

Roosevelt Children’s Academy included goals related to parent and student satisfaction in its Accountability Plan. These goals are:

Goal I: The Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School will demonstrate strong organizational viability by maintaining strong parental support and commitment to the school.

Measure 1: In a yearly parent survey distributed to all parents, 70 percent of parents responding will report that the effectiveness of the school’s academic program, communication and child’s progress is “good” or excellent” (on a scale of “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “poor.”)

The school provides data of strong parent support in its application for charter renewal. In the 2003-04 survey, 92 percent of Roosevelt parents responded that they were satisfied or very satisfied, an improvement from the 87 percent responding positively the previous year. The school’s survey response rate in 2003-04 was at 47.7 percent of 304 surveys distributed. The school’s survey response rate is considered low.

Measure 2: During the school year, the Academy will maintain an enrollment level equal to or exceeding 90 percent capacity and a waiting list equal to or exceeding 10 percent of the school’s population.

The school maintained an enrollment level in excess of 95 percent capacity over the life of the charter. The waiting list figures for 2004-05 were 60 percent of the school's population.

Measure 3: Each year, the average daily attendance rate of all Academy students will be 90 percent or better.

According to the school's renewal application, the school has met or exceeded a 90 percent average daily attendance rate each year. The attendance rate has steadily risen over the life of the charter, exceeding state averages and for the last two years exceeding the averages of the Roosevelt Union Free School District.

<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 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. The school was either in compliance or was in the process of coming into compliance for almost all other areas noted by the State Education Department, including deficiencies in health services and the provision of alternative instruction for suspended students.

The school has presented a mixed record of submitting information to the Institute in a timely manner as provided for in the school's charter. While the school had a poor record of compliance early in its charter, and then an uneven record in 2001 and early 2002, the school has had a very good record of compliance during the last years of its charter.

The generally good compliance record of the school contained a notable exception including the school's adherence to all provisions of the Open Meetings Law. There was evidence that the school had experienced some problems with respect to compliance with its by-laws and the Open Meetings Law. The areas of concern were proper notice of meetings and special meetings to Board members and the public, and appropriate Board use of executive session. The Board currently has a better understanding of its obligations.

The Board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law and has abided by them. One exception is that the school has not fully distributed policies related to the Freedom of Information Law ("FOIL") and has not let parents or staff know of access to the full range of available records.

The school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent counsel to assist the Board in legal matters. The Board also makes use of its management company's counsel and is aware of the inherent legal conflicts in that arrangement.

Overall, 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 oversight and has made decisions that have furthered the school's program and goals. The Board's decision to partner with Victory Schools provided access to start-up capital and some overall stability. By partnering with Victory, the school is able to benefit from economies of scale related to some purchases.

A review of a sample of Board minutes noted evidence that the Board was actively involved with oversight of school finances. At a meeting with Board members during the renewal visit, members demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Board is composed of a diverse group of professionals and its members appeared well informed, engaged and committed to the mission of the school.

The school has established a finance committee comprised of members with substantial financial experience. The Board meets regularly to review reports, budgets and other financial matters of the school. The committee subsequently reports on these matters to the full Board.

The Board has also retained the services of an independent auditor to periodically evaluate the school's financial position, financial procedures and to assist the Board in reviewing the monthly financial position reports.

Beginning with the 2001-02 school year, the school's Board minute packages routinely included year to date financial information including budget to actual comparisons. Victory Schools provides these comprehensive financial reports to the Board, the Principal and onsite Business Manager. The minutes note the presentation of the information and sporadic instances of discussion and questions. Discussion of certain specific subjects such as facilities issues are noted separately. There is no evidence that the Board or budget and finance committee meets with the independent auditor to discuss the annual financial statement audit report.

<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. Budgets have provided a realistic framework for the school's spending activities, and monitoring procedures were in place. However, actual expenses exceeded income in two of four years. While the school has not always operated on a balanced budget, it has never experienced an operating cash shortfall. Its ability to do so has been largely dependent upon Victory Schools deferring a portion of management and central service fees.

In FY 2002 the school's expenses exceeded revenues by \$159,367 due primarily to salaries exceeding the amount budgeted. Overall revenues for that year were close to budgeted revenues, with an unfavorable variance of \$10,212.

Budgets and cash flow projections were generally filed timely. Based on the format of the month-by-month cash flow projections for the first four years, it is unlikely that the school is using such projections for internal purposes. As noted above, this has not had a negative impact on the school's cash flow. The school is modifying the way it prepares the cash flow projections to provide a more accurate depiction of actual cash flows. Ten-year fiscal projections, prepared by Victory Schools, are evidence that long-range plans have been developed.

<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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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.

Victory Schools has developed extensive fiscal policies and procedures and has compiled them into a school level accounting manual that was adopted by the school. Based on interviews with school and Victory Schools staff and review of documentation, the school has established the processes and controls related to payroll, procurement and safeguarding of assets.

Victory Schools received a management letter in conjunction with the school's audit for the year ended June 30, 2003. The letter included recommendations from the auditors concerning certain matters related to the school's internal controls and certain observations and recommendations on other matters. The recommendations were related

to journal entries, invoice processing and cash payment procedures. Management's responses adequately addressed the recommendations.

For the year ended June 30, 2004, the school's auditors issued a management letter that noted certain matters that were described as opportunities for strengthening internal controls and improving operating efficiencies. The matters involved the human resources department procedures and the lack of a system maintenance and disaster recovery plan. In response, management has indicated appropriate actions were taken, or will be taken.

<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 generally met financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were generally filed on time with a few exceptions that occurred in the first two years of its charter. The school's annual financial statement audit reports have all had unqualified opinions. An unqualified auditor's 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 generally accepted accounting principles.

All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school's financial statements. However, for its first three years neither the financial statements nor the notes to the financial statements presented information about expenses by their functional classification, such as major classes of program services and supporting activities. Such presentation is required by Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) Statement No. 117 (*Financial Statements for Not-for Profit Organizations*). Financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2004 did include this required information.

<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 improved its financial condition considerably in the latest school year. After two of three years with deficits, the school had an increase in net assets of \$296,722 (9.68 percent of total expenses). Net assets now total \$143,756 (\$479 per approved number of enrolled students). Overall, the school's operating activities have consistently provided positive cash flow and its overall cash position has been sufficient and stable. The school's liquidity has been improved by the ability to defer payment of some of its management and central services fees to Victory.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$1,526,240 that primarily consist of the school building and land that is its main site at 105 Pleasant Avenue. The school has long-term debt payable (including the current portion due) to Victory Schools totaling \$514,874 (final payment is due June 1, 2010, interest accrues at 9.75 percent). The school also owes Victory Schools \$924,499 related to deferred management and central services fees. In addition, the school has commitments under noncancellable leasing arrangements for modular space of \$109,126 for fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

Except for contributions of \$190,554 for start-up expenses received from Victory Schools, the school has not reported any other financial contributions indicating the school was not dependent on variable income for its financial needs.

Victory is paid a fee of 22 percent of the total revenues for management (seven percent) of the school and central services (15 percent). Victory has allowed the school to repay some of its fees on a long-term basis. Victory will accept payment of these deferred management fees when the school is able to pay. If this relationship were to change or cease, such change could have a substantial effect on the school's ability to continue operations.

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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In its application for charter renewal, Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School proposes a school that will grow to serve a maximum of 648 students in Kindergarten through 11th grades. The plan includes curriculum plans that meet the demands of the Charter Schools Act and the New York State Performance Standards. The staffing and internal assessment plans provided in the school's application for renewal are insufficient.

For grades Kindergarten through four, the school proposes to continue to utilize the curriculum, assessments and other components of its current educational program (see Benchmarks 1B, 1C). The English Language Arts and mathematics curricula for those grades are a continuation of the curriculum piloted during the 2003-04 school year (fourth year of the charter). For grades five through eight, the school's proposed educational program contains the following elements:

- English Language Arts that includes balanced literacy using the Junior Great Books Program,²⁰ readers and writers workshop as designed by the National Writing Project and the Great Source Writing Program, new student assessments using the ITBS and/or other screening program, unit and end of year tests, and a phonics component,
- Impact Mathematics: Algebra and More Program which is consistent with the goals of the federal No Child Left Behind program, aligns with New York State

²⁰ Information on Junior Great Books is available at <http://www.greatbooks.org/>.

performance standards and completes a full year of algebra by the end of eighth grade,

- Life Science, Earth Science and Physical Science aligned to New York State performance standards using as a major text the Glencoe/McGraw Hill science textbook series, and
- the school plans to use Prentice Hall World Explorer.

The high school curriculum included in RCA's application for renewal is that provided by the State Education Department in all content areas.

The school's proposal to serve students from Kindergarten through 11th grades contains an insufficient staffing plan. The school states it will employ one teacher per grade level and provides a budget that deploys resources for the staffing plan. The staffing plan provides no indication of the content knowledge or quality of teaching skills the school seeks in staffing for the grades it requests. Other than specifying that the school's faculty will be culturally diverse, the application is silent on standards for selecting quality faculty. The renewal application is also silent as to the administrative and instructional leadership qualities required of its administrative staff for the school's desired expansion.

As presented in the renewal application, the curriculum proposed for the term of a future charter contains an appropriate level of rigor and depth to enable students to succeed in meeting the New York State performance standards for grades Kindergarten through eight. The Institute finds that the school's proposed curriculum and external assessment plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement. The application is silent on the internal assessment measures or systems the school will create to ensure that middle and high school students are acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills necessary to attain a Regents diploma. In addition, absent details regarding a middle school and high school staffing plan that includes the content knowledge and expertise required of the teaching staff, the school's plans as presented in the application for charter renewal are not 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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The school has submitted a draft Accountability Plan that is largely in line with the demands of the Institute’s Accountability Plan guidelines. While not required in the Accountability Plan, the school’s plans for expansion to serve students in Kindergarten through 11th grades does not include plans for building internal measures of assessment to gauge levels of student achievement between administrations of standardized tests. The Institute will, based upon the final renewal recommendation and vote of the State University Trustees, work with Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School to finalize the school’s Accountability Plan goals and measures and will codify it in any final renewal charter document.

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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Roosevelt Children’s Academy Charter School presents a future enrollment plan for the period extending from the 2005-06 school year to the 2009-10 school year; a five-year term. The schools plans include expansion from its current Kindergarten through sixth grade structure to one that serves students in Kindergarten through 11th grade and enrolls a maximum of 648 students in the 2009-10 school year.

The school has presented a sample calendar that provides a sufficient number of school days and hours of instruction.

Absent the staffing plan and description of internal assessments of student academic achievement detailed in Benchmark 4A, as well as the school’s current facility constraints, the school’s expansion plans are not reasonable, feasible and achievable.

<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 plan presented by the school is optimistic in regards to both projected financial results and facility logistics. However, there is substantial room within the fiscal plan to address additional unanticipated costs or revenue shortfalls. Logistical challenges include obtaining necessary zoning variance approvals and the fact that the school’s vision for a Kindergarten through 12th grade school will require additional space beyond what is contemplated in the plan presented. The school’s fiscal plans are achievable; provided that the demand for enrollment in the school remains high and that the current facility expansion plan can overcome logistical and fiscal hurdles.

Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. These projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. Regardless of the assumptions embedded in the fiscal projections, the school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts and other realities. As noted under Benchmark 3E, the school improved its financial condition in the last year. Also, for the 2004-05 school year, per-pupil funding the school is receiving increased nearly 13 percent. This increase will add to the school’s stability.

The school’s fiscal plan projects an increasingly strong financial position over the proposed renewal charter period. Major assumptions include enrollment growth to 600 students, enrollment at 97 percent of capacity, expense and revenue contingency lines

totaling over \$140,000 in year one and increasing each year, growth for each revenue category of three percent per year, expenses increasing proportional to student growth with three percent annual inflation.

The school plans a two-story expansion at its main site. The plan assumes 80 percent financing from a third party lender such as the NCB Development Corporation (NCBDC) with 20 percent of the equity financing from the school. While this is just one possible source of funds for the school, it is instructive to look at the assumptions made by the school and compare it to reality. The school assumes financing can be obtained with an 8.5 percent interest rate for a term of 15 years. However, in no instances will NCBDC, for example, allow a loan term to exceed the charter term (assumed to be five years in this instance). Also, loan to value ratios of no greater than 75 percent are generally required. Assuming the school could obtain such a loan, these limitations would require the school to spend an additional \$160,000 in up front costs and an additional \$1.5 million in principal and interest costs over the course of the next charter period. The benefit of paying off the loan more quickly would accrue to future charter periods (assuming renewals).

Charter Schools Institute chartered schools that have partnered with Victory Schools, including Roosevelt Children's Academy, have not yet established a consistent record of obtaining positive changes in net assets from year to year. However, the Roosevelt Children's Academy has the best track record to date. The fiscal plan provided projects substantial surpluses in years two through five of the proposed new charter period. Ultimately, it projects equity totaling \$6.9 million at the end of the new charter period. However, the plan appears overly optimistic in the following ways:

- The plan does not appear to provide for the repayment of deferred management fees of approximately \$464,460. This is the amount the school owed as of June 30, 2004 less amounts repaid in July and September of 2004. It is possible the school can repay this amount in FY 2005, but such repayment is not part of its budget for the current year.
- The school states in its renewal application that as classes are added, appropriate support staff will also be added. The school did not provide a detailed roster of its staffing plans, but an examination of certain line items in the fiscal plan raise questions about the adequacy of such staffing. For example, only one (1.0 FTE) special educator is budgeted throughout the proposed new charter period, which is likely inadequate programmatically.
- Also with regard to staffing, the amounts budgeted for salaries, benefits and payroll taxes as a percentage of revenue plummets from 45 percent (actual for FY 2004) to 34.5 percent in the last year of the proposed new charter period. As a school partnered with a management company, it is expected that staff costs as a percent of revenue would be lower than a school without a management company because part of the management company fee goes to pay salaries that are not included in the calculation. However, even allowing for that expectation, the allocation of such a small percentage of revenue to salaries, benefits and payroll taxes is unheard of.
- The plan does not appear to adequately provide for the necessary equipment and furniture required for the expansion.