



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

External Evaluation Report of Leadership Village Academy Charter School

2007 – 2008

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Leadership Village Academy Charter School **External Evaluation Report**

I. INTRODUCTION

The external inspection is part of a comprehensive oversight and evaluation system for those charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“State University Trustees”). The external inspection during the second or third year of a school’s initial five-year charter cycle and periodically thereafter provides an independent assessment of the school’s progress toward meeting the academic and, on a more limited basis, organizational Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a component of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (“State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks”).¹

The external inspection complements the regular reviews conducted by the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) by incorporating the Institute’s documentation of the school’s previous record of performance. This report provides an analysis of the data reviewed before and during the inspection visit and reflects any trends evident therein. In addition, this assessment provides insights which may contribute to the school’s ongoing improvement efforts and support the school’s case when it applies for initial or subsequent charter renewal. Finally, the Institute uses external inspection reports in discussions with school boards about the quality of their schools’ educational programs and the schools’ prospects for charter renewal.

This report is organized in the following sections:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Conduct of the Visit**
- III. School Description**
- IV. Executive Summary**
- V. School Progress Report**
- VI. Overall Trends Regarding the School**

Section I - the “Introduction” provides an overview of the external inspection process, as well as an overview of the organization of this report. Section II - the “Conduct of the Visit” includes a list of the members of the site visit team and their biographical sketches, along with a synopsis of the documents reviewed in preparation for the visit. Section III - the “School Description,” as the title indicates, briefly describes the charter school in terms of its establishment and history. Section IV - the “Executive Summary” provides a summary of the major conclusions reflected in the report.

Section V, entitled the “School Progress Report,” is divided into two parts: Part I, the “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” and Part II, the “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability.” Both parts of the School Progress Report reflect evidence and analysis of the school’s effectiveness in meeting the standards set out in selected QEBs of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks.

¹ A full description of the State University Trustees’ Renewal Benchmarks and *Practices, Policies, and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* can be found at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org>.

The “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” is further divided into two components: the “School Performance Review,” which provides an analysis of student academic performance for the most recent two or three years as an indication of the school’s academic success (Renewal Benchmark 1A), and the “School Educational Program Review,” which reflects the visit team’s analysis of the qualitative aspects of the school’s educational program based upon the guiding questions provided by the Institute and aligned with Renewal Benchmarks 1B - 1F.

“Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability,” focuses on three components: clarity of the school’s mission and vision to its stakeholders; parent and student satisfaction; and the establishment of systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school’s instructional program. Renewal Benchmarks 2B, 2D.1, and 2C.1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

In the final section of the External Visit report, Section VI - “Overall Trends Regarding the School,” the visit team offers its insights about any patterns that have emerged across the full spectrum of the school. Here the team offers its judgments about the school’s effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 as amended (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

- improving student learning and achievement;
- increasing learning opportunities for all students (particularly students at risk of academic failure);
- encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- creating new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- expanding parental choice in public schools; and
- moving from a rule-based to performance-based accountability system by holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

The judgments of the team are organized into two categories: academic program and organizational viability. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in Appendix A. For your reference, the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, in their entirety, may be found on the Institute’s website at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Leadership Village Academy Charter School was conducted on May 12 and 13, 2008 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, an educational consulting company located in Beverly, MA. The team included:

- **Cecelia D. Brady** currently serves as an Executive Leadership Coach of the DC New Leaders for New Schools program, coaching resident and post-resident principals. She joined NLNS in June, 2004 following a 33 year career as an educator with the District of Columbia Public Schools. Cecelia became a classroom teacher, teaching grades K through 6 and then went on to pursue a Masters degree in Guidance Counseling from Bowie State and an Administrative Certificate from Trinity College. After completing her MED, she became counselor at Stevens Elementary in downtown Washington, DC, and assistant principals and principal at various District of Columbia Public Schools.
- **Carlton Jordan** is a consultant with SchoolWorks and an independent educational consultant. Formerly, he was a Senior Associate with the Education Trust and founding member of Renaissance Middle School in Montclair, NJ. Carlton holds a BA in economics and an MA in education from the State University of New York at Albany.
- **Marc Siciliano** is a consultant for SchoolWorks. He has taught mathematics and science for more than ten years in Illinois, California and New York. He has served as lead teacher, director and curriculum developer. For the past several years, he has consulted for Science Education for Public Understanding Program (SEPUP) in New York City piloting a new high school science curriculum. He has trained science teachers on curricula and pedagogical approaches to inquiry-based science through technology and hands-on learning. As Director of the Math, Science and Technology Academy at Lake View High School in Chicago, he was responsible for coordinating curriculum, instruction and assessments while supporting teachers for 270 students. He directed a gender equity initiative to create, implement, and sustain a science program for 325 students in grade 7 – 12. He has consulted for the New York State Regents, supporting 21 schools and more than 50 science teachers. During the past two years, he has consulted for SchoolWorks in Washington D.C., where he has led school review teams and wrote many accountability reports for the DC charter schools.

As noted above, the team used the QEBs, a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, as the guides for its evaluation. In addition, the team relied on a set of framework questions to structure the “School Progress Report” section of this document. Prior to the two-day visit, the team reviewed the school’s documents, including its annual *Accountability Plan Progress Report*, reports from previous site visits by the Charter Schools Institute or other entities, such as the New York State Education Department, and relevant sections of the school’s charter agreement. During the visit, the team observed classes, reviewed student work, interviewed school administrators, school board members, staff, parents and students, and reviewed curriculum and other documents to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application for Leadership Village Academy Charter School (“Leadership Village Academy”) on June 25, 2002 (the school was originally named East New York Village Academy Charter School with the school’s board of trustees adopting the current name in March of 2005), and it was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on September 13, 2002. The school took three planning years, in large part due to an inability to find an adequate facility in the desired Community School District.

The school began instruction in August of 2005 at 315 East 113th Street, New York, New York, serving 59 students in fifth grade, added grade 6 in 2006-07 for an enrollment of 114 students, and plans to grow one grade each year with a projected enrollment of 242 students in fifth through ninth grades by the 2009-10 school year.

The State University Trustees granted the school a short-term planning-year renewal on March 20, 2007, for a period of three years, extending its charter to incorporate the initial planning years.

The school will relocate to 2351 First Ave., 4th Fl., New York, New York for the 2008-09 school year.

At the time of the inspection visit, the board of trustees of Leadership Village Academy Charter School was comprised of the following individuals:

- Mr. James Thompson;
- Mr. Charles Ledley;
- Ms. Catherine Viscardi Johnston;
- Dr. Andrew August;
- Dr. Deborah Kenny;
- Mr. David Zwiebel; and
- Ms. Donna Willson.

The mission statement for Leadership Village Academy, as stated in the school’s original charter, and as reflected in the school’s short-term planning year renewal report, is as follows:

“to develop students of fine character who graduate from college and make a positive contribution to society.”

According to the Executive Summary of the charter, the founders envisioned Leadership Village Academy as “a place where students work hard and love it, just as a real athlete is entirely immersed in her game, or a serious musician gets perfectly lost in his music. It is a place where students look forward to the challenge of a harder book or a more difficult equation, pushing their limits each day.” The charter states that Leadership Village Academy will achieve its mission through the following key design elements of the school:

- Teaching students to be “academic athletes” with a passion for learning and the discipline of hard work;
- Extended day and year;

- Liberal arts curriculum shaped by rigorous standards of excellence;
- School uniforms;
- High expectations for conduct and focus on learning;
- Investing in teachers – recruit, develop, support, and reward excellent teachers;
- Creating a school as a “village,” a small and respectful learning community;
- Strong connection and frequent communication with families;
- Village Council weekly gathering of the academy for debate, reflection, and inspiration; and
- Investing in teachers by building a results-driven organization where excellent educators thrive.

The school has received planning and development support from the Village Academies Network, Inc., a non-profit education organization that also provides certain services and funding to the school.

The school includes a liberal arts curriculum, developed by Village Academies Network and aligned to New York State performance standards, with a strong focus on reading and math. Technology is integrated throughout the learning experience. In addition, the program includes college counseling beginning in the sixth grade. While planning for the opening, the school’s leadership team determined that working with fifth grade students as they progressed to ninth grade over the life of the charter would be more appropriate for serving students at-risk of academic failure. Therefore a request to revise the school’s charter to allow the school’s program to begin with a fifth grade rather than sixth grade was made to the University Trustees and granted prior to the school opening.

The school also utilizes grade level and departmental “*kounaikenshuu*,” a Japanese practice of “collaborative instructional strategy, driven by quantitative and qualitative student performance data and serious study of students’ work.” Kounaikenshuu ensures the “coherence of students’ horizontal (within a grade) and vertical (over time) experience.”

School Year

186 instructional days² (divided into 10 diagnostic periods)

School Day

8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

² A school year of 200 instructional days, contained within three trimesters, is identified in the school’s original charter; however, the school amended this as stated above in its application for a Short Term Planning Year Renewal.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment³	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2002-03	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2003-04	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2004-05	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed	Opening Delayed
2005-06	312	56	59	6-8	5	5	YES
2006-07	416	107	114	6-9	5-6	5-6	YES
2007-08	165	NA	159	5-7	NA	5-7	YES
2008-09	212			5-8			
2009-10	242 ⁴			5-9			

Race/Ethnicity	2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Black (Not Hispanic)	35	63.6%
Hispanic	20	36.4%
White	0	0.0%

Source: NYSED Database

Free/Reduced Lunch	2005-2006		2006-07	
	% of Enroll. Leadership Village	% of Enroll. CSD #4	% of Enroll. Leadership Village	% of Enroll. CSD #4
Eligible for Free Lunch	52.7%	77%	56.9%	74.8%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	23.6%	7%	19.8%	5%

Source: NYSED Database

³ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2005-06 database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, cited an enrollment of 55 for 2005-06.

⁴ Per the Short-Term Planning Year Renewal granted to Leadership Village Academy Charter School, grades served and total enrollment in the 2009-10 school year are dependant on adequate facility space as approved by the State University Trustees.

Special Populations	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Leadership Village	% of Enroll. CSD #4	% of Enroll. Leadership Village	% of Enroll. CSD #4
Students with Disabilities	7.8%	NA	8.6	17.9
Limited English Proficient	0%	12%	0%	11.7

Source: NYSED Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1 st Year	2002-03	Planning Year	N/A	N/A	
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2003-04	Planning Year	N/A	N/A	
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2004-05	Opening Delayed	N/A	N/A	
Original Charter – 4 th Year	2005-06	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	Granted change in program to begin with grade 5
Original Charter – 5 th Year	2006-07	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	Short term planning year renewal granted for a period of 3 years
Second Charter – 1 st Year	2007-08	3 rd	Yes	External Evaluation Report	

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership Village Academy Charter School is high functioning in the areas of instructional practice, leadership, and organizational structure. The quality of classroom instruction is extremely even across classrooms and of high caliber throughout. The school has designed an instructional delivery routine that ensures high expectations, academic rigor, and scholarly behavior. Content is aligned, and teaching and learning are driven by assessment data. The board of trustees is knowledgeable and informed and willing to do what it needs to do to ensure that the school fulfills its mission of preparing each student to matriculate into and graduate from college.

The school's operational philosophy balances a set of tight structures and strict focus on results with loose oversight of experienced professionals. While the school demands a strict adherence to a set of common tools and practices such as standards, assessment, and certain rituals, it allows teachers to create curriculum in an ongoing manner. There is little formal evaluation of teachers at Leadership Village Academy, but there is much informal and peer feedback and coaching. Teachers at the school recognize that their performance is ultimately judged upon the achievement of their students. At the time of the visit, this loose/tight structure was working well for the school; the school's staff was collegial, stable and functioning very well in the classroom.

In contrast to the freedom given to teachers, Leadership Village Academy Charter School is structured and deliberate in many areas. There is a cohesive, systematic, and comprehensive data management system for generating, collecting, compiling, and analyzing formative and summative assessment data. The school has designed a deliberate, multi-year curriculum development and refinement process. The culture of the school is defined by routines and rituals which are performed by students on cue from the teachers; the inspection team was impressed that many rituals, such as independent reading during transition time, was widely evident without teacher prompting.

The school is still developing in a few areas. The school recognizes that they are not presently teaching higher-order thinking across all classrooms. Special education continues to be a weakness of Leadership Village Academy. Modification guidance is informal, and teachers mentioned the need for professional development in modifying lesson plans and adjusting student work expectations to align with Individual Education Program (IEP) goals. The school has begun to address previous concerns about the ad hoc nature of its professional development. The inspection team noted a professional development calendar with sustained themes. Village Academies, the non-profit organization which serves as the school's partner, has also hired an English language arts director who delivers professional development, among other duties, to large groups and individual teachers. There is, however, a need for professional development in working with students with special education needs.

Stakeholders in the Leadership Village Academy Charter School community understand and embrace the overall vision and mission of the school. The school has implemented the key design elements in its charter, and parent/guardians and students are generally very satisfied with the school.

V. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

Part I: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success

A. "School Performance Review"

Performance Summary: Although not all measures in the Accountability Plan yet apply, preliminary results suggest Leadership Village Academy is on track to meeting both the English language arts and mathematics goals in its Accountability Plan. The science and social studies goals cannot be evaluated until the school has an 8th grade in 2008-09. The school is deemed to be in good standing under the state's NCLB accountability system.

English language arts: Preliminary results indicate the school is on track to meeting its English language arts goal. The absolute measure does not apply until the school has students enrolled for two or more years; however, in 2005-06, Leadership Village Academy's first year of operation, 66 percent of 5th grade students scored at the proficient level on the state exam. The next year 72 percent of 5th and 6th grade students who had been enrolled for at least one year were proficient, coming very close to the 75 percent target. In both years the school exceeded the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system, and outperformed the local school district, last year by a wide margin (note: this comparative measure also does not apply until students have been enrolled for two or more years). Compared to demographically similar schools state-wide, Leadership Village Academy performed better than predicted and exceeded the Effect Size target in 2004-05. While the school also performed better than predicted in 2006-07, it did not achieve its Effect Size target. However, it should be noted that the 5th grade, which had only been in the school for a few months when it took the exam, performed worse than predicted, while the 6th grade with a year under its belt was performing far better than predicted. In terms of growth on the state exam, the 6th grade cohort in 2006-07 achieved its target and finished the year above the 75 percent absolute target. On the Stanford 9 exam, however, the 6th grade's average NCE declined from 63 in 2005-06 to 58 in 2006-07. Despite the slight decline, the cohort still performed above the national norm.

Mathematics: Preliminary results indicate Leadership Village Academy is on track to meeting its mathematics goal. In 2005-06, its first year of operation, 80 percent of 5th grade students scored at the proficient level on the state exam, exceeding the 75 percent target. The next year 98 percent of students who were in their second year were proficient. In both years the school exceeded the AMO and outperformed the local school district by wide margins. More strikingly, in comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Leadership Village Academy performed far better than predicted in both years. In terms of growth on the state exam, the 6th grade cohort improved its performance from 90 percent proficient in 2005-06 to 100 percent proficient in 2006-07. On the Stanford 9 exam, however, the 6th grade cohort's performance declined from an average NCE of 90 to 82, although still far above the national norm.

Science: Not yet applicable.

Social Studies: Not yet applicable.

NCLB: The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts
Leadership Village Academy Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: None	MET	2005-06 Grades Served: 5	MET	2006-07 Grades Served: 5-6	MET					
ABSOLUTE MEASURES	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)					
	Grades	Grades	Grades	Grades	Grades	Grades					
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4 (0) (0)	3 (0) (0)	4 (0) (0)	3 (0) (0)	4 (0) (0)	3 (0) (0)					
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	8 (0) (0)	All 66.1 (59) (0)	5 66.1 (59) (0)	All 61.7 (107) 71.7 (46)	5 66.1 (59) (0)	All 61.7 (107) 71.7 (46)					
COMPARATIVE MEASURES	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO					
	4	8	5	5	163	122					
3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)					
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate.	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District					
	4	8	5	5	66.1	50.8					
VALUE ADDED MEASURE	Grades	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size	% FL	Actual	Predicted	Effect Size			
	4	8	59	66.1	58.4	0.38	56.9	62.3	57.0		
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the NYSTP. An asterick indicates cohort met target.	Assessment: SAT-9	Assessment: SAT-9	Assessment: SAT-9	Assessment: SAT-9	Assessment: NYSTP	Assessment: NYSTP	Gr	N	Base	Target	Result
	NA	of	5	of	4	5	6	41	73.2	74.1	75.6 *
	N	Base	Target	Result	All	45	66.7	70.9	71.1		

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics
Leadership Village Academy Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: None		2005-06 Grades Served: 5		2006-07 Grades Served: 5-6		MET
	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	
<u>ABSOLUTE MEASURES</u>							
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4 (0)	(0)	3 (0) 4 (0) 5 79.7 (59) 6 (0) 7 (0) 8 (0) All 79.7 (59)	(0) (0) (0) (0) (0) (0) (0) (0)	3 (0) 4 (0) 5 88.7 (53) 6 96.1 (51) 7 (0) 8 (0) All 92.3 (104)	(0) (0) (4) (42) (0) (0) (46)	MET
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades 4 8	PI AMO	Grades 5	PI AMO	Grades 5-6	PI AMO	YES YES
<u>COMPARATIVE MEASURES</u>							
3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	4 8	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4) Grades School District	5	79.7 55.2	6	97.8 49.4	YES
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on the Free Lunch (FL) rate.	Grades 4 8	Actual Predicted Effect Size	59 79.7 60.3 0.85	66.8 1.43	56.9 92.3 66.8 1.43	YES YES	YES
<u>VALUE ADDED MEASURE</u>							
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam. An asterisk indicates cohort met target.	Grades N	Assessment: SAT-9 Cohorts Making Target of Target Result	41 90.2 90.3 100.0 *	41 90.2 90.3 100.0 *	41 90.2 90.3 100.0 *	41 90.2 90.3 100.0 *	YES
	All	45 82.2	82.3	82.3	97.8	97.8	11

Data Sources: New York State and City data, workbooks submitted by schools and databases compiled by the Institute.

B. “School Educational Program Review”

Benchmark 1B: The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.

Leadership Village Academy has a thoughtful, fully aligned assessment system to collect and analyze student data and inform instruction and curricular decisions. The school earned some of New York’s highest mathematics scores on the assessments required by the New York State Testing Program. On the state mathematics assessment 89% of fifth-grade students and 96% of the sixth-grade students are proficient or advanced. Reading data outpaced New York City and the Community District data, but similar to New York City and the Community District, reading scores were not as high as math scores. However, Leadership Village Academy did exceed its accountability target with 76% of the sixth-grade students proficient or advanced.

Although students made good progress in English language arts, Village Academies conducted an item analysis of the school’s Grade-Level Standards Assessment (GLSA) and the Leveled Standard Assessment (LSA) data to form flexible student groups and monitor academic progress. The findings resulted in a shift from using leveled texts and accompanying comprehension questions to using leveled texts with teacher-developed comprehension questions resembling those on the state assessment. Teachers and school leadership reported that this subtle change was made to promote greater alignment with the standards and state assessments. Now Leadership Village Academy reviews data to identify students in need of targeted instruction aligned to the state assessment as well as general reading and mathematics skills practice. There are ten diagnostic periods in which data gathered from weekly quizzes and the assessments identified below are reported and used to drive curricular and instructional change.

The Grade-Level Standards Assessment (GLSA) is a practice state test. It is used to identify a student’s ability to answer test-like questions applied to grade-level passages that are aligned to the state standards. The GLSA for grades six through eight includes a writing section. The GLSA is given during the fifth week of school only. The assessment is used to identify struggling students, highlight areas of need, and create individual plans for students.

The school’s focus on literacy and improving reading and writing skills is reflected in its threefold assessment system. A Running Record (RR) is administered during the first week of school. Students read texts on their developmental level. The teacher administering the assessment indicates errors and the use of student fix-up strategies. At Leadership Village Academy, a RR is administered quarterly and used to identify instructional and independent reading levels, monitor progress, and determine support needs. The Frequency Snapshot (FS) is administered in tandem with the running record and is used to gather information on word accuracy and fluency. Teachers listen to students read instructional-level texts for one minute while monitoring word accuracy and reading rate. The Leveled Standard Assessment (LSA) replaced the Leveled Reading Assessment (LRA). The change reflects a desire for greater alignment. The content and the skills on the LSA are the same as the LRA, but the questions on the LSA are teacher developed and resemble the structure of the questions on the state assessment. The LSA is shorter than the GLSA and is given four times a year. It is used to monitor progress and determine intervention needs. Data from the FS, LSA, and student work completed during class are combined to determine whether students are ready to move forward as well as determine intervention needs.

Results from these assessments are entered into a Data Driven Instructional Planning Spreadsheet (DIPS), which facilitates the presentation and use of this information. The staff analyzes the data for trends and teachers identify students needing intervention. Currently, there are ten diagnostic periods in Leadership Village Academy's school year, although this is subject to change in the next school year. Students, parents, and caregivers are kept abreast of student performance and any necessary intervention strategies that may be needed through diagnostic student performance reports disseminated at the end of each diagnostic period.

During the teacher focus group interviews, teachers conveyed "a sense of urgency" around the use of data. They reported that the data generated from the battery of assessments listed above is routinely collected and analyzed by teachers. Teachers also explained how data are used to make adjustments in the pace of content or to identify students in need of intervention in the form of a pullout group called Small Group Instruction (SGI).

In summary, Leadership Village Academy has created a thoughtfully aligned, transparent assessment system to collect, analyze, and report to students and caregivers assessment data which informs reading level material, flexible, homogenous intervention groups, and short-lived, in-class heterogeneous pairings. The inspection team observed the in-class groupings, and students who participated in the focus group mentioned attending Small Group Instruction (SGI), and the homogenous intervention based on test data. During the teacher focus groups, teachers mentioned that the small groups observed by the inspection team consisted of homogenous groups as well as heterogeneous groups based on student performance data.

Benchmark 1C: The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

The school has a multi-year process for developing curriculum. Mathematics, English language arts and writing are the most developed, while science and social studies are in the nascent phases of curricular development. All curricula, regardless of level of development, are fully aligned to state standards. A written scope and sequence for English, mathematics and writing exists, and the school is phasing in the documents for science and social studies.

Village Academies developed standards based on New York State Standards and further positioned those standards as pre- and post-state assessment standards. This allows fifth-grade teachers to begin teaching sixth-grade standards after the midyear state assessment and seventh- and eighth-grade teachers to do the same, teaching toward the subsequent grade level. With this vision, students experience an entire year's worth of grade-level standards before taking the state assessment.

These Village Academy Standards drive the Village Academies scope and sequence, leaving the teachers to "align, enhance, and prioritize" the standards. Teachers develop unit plans and lesson plans for the content areas. This is a defined process in which teachers using the standards, student data, lesson plans, and teacher reflection create and refine the scope and sequence during the month-long August professional development. Mathematics, English language arts, and writing have gone through this process.

The school's mathematics curriculum is fully developed and refined. English language arts and writing are fully developed as indicated by the curriculum binders, yet each is still undergoing refinement. English language arts is undergoing refinement in the area of assessments and writing in

the area of focus, while purpose instead of genre will drive refinement in student writing. The writing teacher stated that the shift from genre to purpose will result in more authentic student writing. While this remains to be seen, the inspection team noted the level of scrutiny the curriculum undergoes during the refinement phase of curriculum development.

Science and social studies curricula are emerging: No written scope and sequence or articulated goals and objectives were made available to the inspection team. School leadership acknowledged that these two content areas are the least developed. The initial focus of the school and its sister school (Harlem Village Academy Charter School, also authorized by the State University Trustees) was mathematics and reading and the process and experience gained from developing those curricula will be used to develop and then refine social studies and science curricula. The school stated that social studies and science will be teacher driven, and the process will reflect that used in mathematics and English language arts.

Teachers are well aware of the timeline for science and social studies development, reporting that social studies and science are being “phased in.” Currently, one teacher delivers both social studies and science, and students receive one semester of each. Next year, a full year of social studies and science are slated for fifth and sixth grade students, and the Village Academy curriculum development process will continue in earnest for these disciplines.

Leadership Village Academy does not mandate what materials and instructional methods teachers use. A previous attempt at mandating procedures and formalizing systems created elements of a negative culture as articulated by the leadership focus group. Once those systems and mandates were removed, they reported that “a more positive and safe” environment emerged. The school’s leadership stated that it strives to hire the absolute highest quality teachers and give them the resources to teach, holding them accountable by results. Teachers confirmed this, stating that there is an implicit understanding that they are professionals. As one teacher stated during the focus group interview, “We’re shaping the curriculum and overall procedures and policies of the school.” One integral resource for the strongest curricular area, mathematics, is the Singapore Math books that provide the foundation for teaching mathematics at Leadership Village Academy. The standards drive curriculum, and along with the standards, teachers participate in *kounaikenshuu*, a Japanese lesson study process which focuses on units, student work, instruction, and deep content knowledge. *Kounaikenshuu* is practiced across the content areas.

There are no textbooks in English language arts, but there are resources that range from how to implement literature circles to how to implement a writing workshop. There are a variety of texts, some class sets and many novels for independent, grade-level reading.

Overall, the school’s approach to curricular design is a reflection of its belief that the teacher is “the single most important factor in learning.” Because there is a safe, collegial environment, teachers often talk to each other when seeking curricular suggestions. Science and social studies still remain underdeveloped, but with the plan to hire another full-time teacher social studies is projected to undergo the Village Academy curriculum development process in earnest.

Benchmark ID.1: The school has strong instructional leadership.

There is an effective distributive approach to instructional leadership which complements the philosophy of the school. The school’s leadership team members include the executive director,, the school principal, and assistant principal. This leadership team reported that it is convinced it has

attracted the highest quality teachers available and created a professional culture that values the thinking and craft each teacher brings to his or her content area. In the teacher focus groups, teachers said, “They [leadership] listen to us and treat us as professionals.” Leadership Village Academy has created a culture that respects the content knowledge teachers bring to the school, and teachers expressed that it is a place they want to work. This statement is supported by the 100 percent teacher retention rate from the 2006-07 school year to the 2007-08 school year.

When asked, “Who do you go to when you need help?” teachers responded, “Each other,” then mentioned the writing teacher, the mathematics director (current assistant principal and future 2008-09 principal), and the English language arts director. The mathematics and English language arts directors meet with teachers twice a month. It was revealed during the focus groups that a lesson the inspection team observed was informed by two other teachers at the table. Each was pleasantly surprised that the other made suggestions for the lesson, and that the teacher combined the suggestions to create a stronger, more focused learning experience for the students.

The school leaders do not conduct formal observations. Instead, a number of informal observations take place: peer-to-peer, administrator-to-teacher and director-to-teacher. Teachers report being observed at least once a week. Informal observations are followed-up with informal e-mails or conversations during school about the teaching. No written records are kept. The expectation of a number of informal observations coupled with peer-to-peer observations and lesson study, and low stakes director conversations about teaching and learning may very well accomplish what infrequent formal observations attempt to accomplish – strengthening teaching and learning.

Lesson plans are collected and reviewed only at the beginning of the school year. The expectation is that teachers follow the Village Academies Standards and administer weekly quizzes on Friday to measure learning and by extension the efficacy of teaching. During the leadership focus group, the executive director said, “If you are going into a classroom with an experienced teacher with a proven track record, why would you require [a formal lesson plan]? We only require it when it is needed.” It appears that the real focus is more on efficacy than experience. If the need arises, a struggling teacher will continue to hand lesson plans in beyond the beginning of the year for review. The executive director conveyed to the inspection team that Leadership Village Academy is interested in “developing systems that bring out the best in people.” That best is measured by student performance.

There is a clearly observable, efficient, systematic routine for delivering high quality content at the school. Very little, if any, classroom time is wasted. Village Academies has made the choice to prescribe the standards maps, assessments, and classroom delivery, but not curricular materials. This decision affords an element of teacher autonomy regulated by frequent peer and leadership informal observations, classroom routine, and student assessment results. At Leadership Village Academy only essential processes and systems (for example, the administration of assessments and using data) are non-negotiable. Teachers report that they must be able to answer the questions: What do the data reveal and who are you pulling for intervention (known as Small Group Instruction SGI) this week? The vast amount of data requires that professional development time every other Friday be data focused.

The leadership has structured professional development so that it is responsive to student performance and teacher needs. The inspection team noted a professional development calendar reflecting ongoing and sustained professional development for the school at-large. A document

review revealed a rather comprehensive and completed rubric and follow-up sheet used for observing teacher practice. Teachers decide upon the focus of the observation, working with the English language arts director on self-identified areas. For example, a teacher might choose a bell-to-bell observation or an observation that focuses on an element of the classroom experience, a mini-lesson, discussion or classroom management. While this too is informal, it reflects leadership's attempt to provide the necessary resources for high quality teaching to happen continuously at Leadership Village Academy.

The school reports that the balance between mandating and not mandating processes depends much on the quality of teachers. The process that helps to ensure quality teachers are hired is simple yet exhaustive. Apart from interviews and a demonstration lesson, prospective teachers must spend the entire teacher day at the school. Many of the current teachers often choose to work until the early evening hours to complete work and prepare for future activities. During the teacher focus group, teachers spoke of the principal's transparency and honesty during their interviews about what it takes to be a member of the staff at Leadership Village Academy. This whittles the list of prospective teachers down considerably to those most likely to fit the culture present at Leadership Village Academy.

Next year, the assistant principal will become the principal. The current principal will become an executive instructional director across all Village Academy campuses. It appears that the safe environment, shared instructional leadership, and professional atmosphere have wrought an effective leadership transition that is already underway. Parents and teachers alike remarked positively on the smooth transition and foresight of hiring from within Leadership Village Academy.

The school has effectively created a safe environment that encourages teacher efficacy instead of mandating specific pedagogical approaches. The leadership team has also fostered a culture of transparency and trust that revolves around data and what the data say about teaching as well as learning.

The curricular process established by the Village Academies has resulted in genuine teacher ownership of the curriculum and a sense that quality curricular guides are created, implemented, and then refined by the teachers before becoming more permanent. During a teacher focus group, teachers communicated their appreciation for the process, stating that they create quality curriculum for a school and administration that value their expertise. Unfortunately, the process is time consuming and slow, and social studies and science have not yet gone through the process. This curriculum development model combined with the regular duties of teaching and learning results in a long school day. During a focus group, some teachers wondered whether or not they would be able to sustain such long hours when balancing the demands of family and work.

Benchmark 1D.2: High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.

Instruction is delivered efficiently and high quality instruction is evident. Overall, the quality of instruction is high; the transitions between activities are extremely efficient; and disruptive behavior is virtually nonexistent. One teacher affirmed the environment of the school. She mentioned, "The discipline policy allows us to teach," and all other teachers in the focus group nodded in agreement. There isn't much of an overt emphasis on discipline and rules. While rules for conduct were posted in every room, the inspection team noted an internal understanding of the school's discipline philosophy and approach to delivering instruction. As mentioned in the leadership focus group,

student posture, body language, and conduct have been emphasized over time and are now part and parcel of the school's culture. For example, when working independently, students must face forward, and when a peer is speaking, all student must turn to face the speaker. Students are taught the physicality of visible engagement and active participation that communicate intellectual interest and engagement to speakers and fellow discussants. This behavior is seen from one classroom to the next without fail, and in many cases gentle reminders are mentioned without any major disruption in instruction. The academic dean aptly characterized the environment as a "culture of commitment and consistency."

The inspection team noted on several occasions the orderliness extends beyond the classroom and into transitions from one class to the next. Just before the class period ends, students participate in a "cool down" activity, and then prepare to exit the classroom in single file. The line stays intact during the transition, and students are almost absolutely silent. Teachers stand in the hallways with the students as the students move to their next classroom. The receiving teacher greets each student by name and hands out the Do Now/Sprint activity sheets upon entering. Most notable during the transitions is some students utilizing the time for pleasure reading.

At the beginning of each mathematics class observed, students participated in "Sprint" activities, trying to complete as many computations as they could within a set time limit. In reading, students worked on their "Do Now." The teacher walked around checking independent reading logs and discussing the process of reading with individual students. Students who completed the Do Now read silently from self-selected, leveled reading material.

Differentiating instruction around process and product, the more obvious differentiation, is not an essential instructional element of teaching at Leadership Village Academy. The school differentiates around content, mostly upon reading content. Using Fountas and Pinell classifications, students read from different, leveled texts and enter that daily reading in their logs.

Instructional time is maximized at Leadership Village Academy. The inspectors noted that transitions between activities were minimized 89 percent of the time in the classrooms observed. 100 percent of the time, observers noted the appropriate pace of material and the effective use of instructional time. The inspection team found learning objectives were posted in 83 percent of the classrooms observed. In 94 percent of the classrooms observed, all students were on task with a high degree of cognitive engagement. Teachers checked for understanding 100 percent of the time, leaning toward question and uptake exchange—teachers asked questions and students provided the answer. Very little large group discussion was observed. However, the inspection team noted much timed/controlled discussion in the form of pair-sharing that Leadership Village Academy teachers called Turn-and-Talk.

The inspection team noted that teachers elicited higher order responses from students in only 28 percent of the classrooms observed. The majority of student responses did not include synthesis, evaluation or analysis. The literacy director mentioned during his interview that more long-term planning and less short-term planning should result in more higher-order thinking questioning. The literacy director further spoke of releasing more trust to the students as reflected in sustained classroom conversation. "Real growth comes when you put trust in kids," the literacy director said. He spoke of a "transition of trust," a moving of sorts from Turn-and-Talk as the predominant strategy to elicit classroom conversation and higher order thinking to literature circles. The director believes literature circles will increase the amount of student-to-student talking and the generation of questions.

The quality of instruction was also evident in the writing samples analyzed by the inspection team. An evaluation of student writing portfolios revealed writing that was process oriented. Students produced multiple drafts. Teacher comments reflected feedback and guidance for subsequent drafts in the form of typed letters from the writing instructor praising students for what they did well and offering students another chance at revision based on the typed suggestions if students so choose. There are two substantive pieces of writing each marking period. One piece of writing receives much feedback and guidance; the other, a little less and is graded more heavily with the rubric. On the second piece of writing, students demonstrate what they can and cannot do with little teacher assistance.

In summary, teachers create an urgent tone and a quick pace which maximizes students' time on task. Much process writing occurs over the course of the year. Students receive quality feedback and guidance, and teacher use rubrics to assess student writing. A very high percentage of the students are proficient in mathematics, reflecting the quality and efficiency of instruction. The character development around the behaviors of successful college students is evident in the students' listening and independent work postures; these behaviors facilitate the efficient delivery of instruction. However, the inspection team observed that the level of teacher/student and student/student questions still does not provoke students to synthesize, evaluate or analyze, and sustained large group discussion was not widely observed.

Benchmark 1D. 3: The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.

The school has a variety of programs available to support at-risk students. However, teachers mentioned a need for professional development in modifying lessons for students that receive special education services, understanding IEPs, and clarity in the special education referral process.

The school leadership, teachers and board members all spoke of "catching kids up" as essential to the mission of the school in preparing students for college. Therefore, all fifth-grade students have word study built into their daily schedules. All students receive a double period of mathematics (Math 1 and Math 2). Math 1 is skills based and Math 2 is content and process based.

Beyond the support built into the daily schedule, students needing additional interventions are pulled out for Small Group Instruction (SGI) taught by content area teachers. The array of assessments mentioned earlier is used to identify students in need of SGI. Students are given the choice of when to attend this small group intervention, which may occur during the school day while students are in pleasure reading, gym class or lunch. If students choose not to attend during the day, they must attend SGI after school.

The teachers interviewed spoke of the importance of choice for the students needing SGI. This choice is another element of the college going nature of the school. Students are asked to make informed and important choices about their academics. There is no choice, however, given to students about whether or not they will receive the intervention if the data says they need help. Students simply choose what they are willing to give up for that intervention. Students with the grade of C or below must attend Saturday school. A month before the state assessment, all students must attend Saturday School. Four to five teachers provide the instruction to those students.

While Leadership Village Academy has hired a special education coordinator to work in the identification process for students in need of services and to ensure compliance, special education continues to be a weakness at Leadership Village Academy. Meetings around modifying content and instruction are informal, occurring between classrooms or in the teacher room. Teachers mentioned a desire for professional development around modifying content and instruction for students with special education needs, and a chance to better understand the landscape of IEPs at Leadership Village Academy. One teacher explained that it is not enough to have, “one or two workshops a year on how to use an IEP form to make modifications.”

Leadership Village Academy shares the speech teacher with the district school also housed in the same building. The speech teacher works two days a week with Leadership Village Academy students in need of speech services. At the time of the inspection, the social worker, who splits her time between the Leadership Village Academy and Harlem Village was on maternity leave. The special education coordinator was away. While these three work with students requiring special education services and/or programs, teachers thought that the school might benefit from another counselor and/or social worker. The request for a social worker was also conveyed to leadership through teacher surveys.

In summary, Leadership Village Academy has supports built into the schedule through double periods of mathematics and reading for all students and provides SGI during the school day for those needing the intervention. After school, the school provides mathematics and homework club and SGI for the students wanting the after school SGI support. Special education continues to be a weakness at Leadership Village Academy. Teachers mentioned a request for professional development in IEP modifications.

Benchmark 1E: The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.

The school’s written documents regarding culture, academics and mission were reflected in observed practice and promote a culture of learning. Leadership Village Academy students, staff, parents, and board members believe the goal of creating a respectful, rigorous learning culture has been accomplished. The school has structured an orderly, learning environment where the discipline policy not only appears on the walls and in written documents, but is communicated to parents, taught, enacted, and reinforced in a way that promotes learning. Board members mentioned that as fifth-grade students become acclimated to Leadership Village Academy, “They want to be here.” The student attendance rate, which hovers around 97 percent, confirms the positive environment that the school has created.

Inspection team members noted the respect shown toward the younger students from the older students during the student focus group. When a younger student misspoke answering a factual question about the mission, he was allowed to finish, and the factual information was politely and respectfully corrected. One gets a sense that the student modeled the behavior he sees directed toward students from teachers. As one student shared during the focus group interview, “They [teachers] can’t yell at us.” “Teachers treat us with respect.”

Leadership Village Academy is attempting to create and nurture a college going culture within its walls. All classrooms are identified by college and university names. Student work and reading progress charts take their position alongside college posters on the school’s walls. The fact that the teachers do not have text books contributes to the culture of learning and scholarship at Leadership

Village Academy. More than a deep content knowledge, the school, in the words of a teacher, engenders a “level of investment in each other’s work.” The students appreciate the hard work and investment the teachers pour into them. One student stated, “Teachers work on making it fun. We don’t have any textbooks; everything is fresh.”

The Academic Athlete, a key element of the school’s culture, was evident to all the inspectors. The expectation is that students will read, and read often, three hours a week. They read in the classrooms, in the hallways. The school has thirty minutes per day of pleasure reading for grades six through eight. In the words of one parent, “The school celebrates nerdiness.” This is reinforced in the non-wavering stance on homework completion. Homework must be done, and daily homework planners have to be signed by parents. If they are not signed, students receive a demerit. Three demerits equal a detention; nine demerits, an in-school suspension. At the end of the year, all students participate in a college tour, unless the privilege has been revoked because of a large number of demerits.

Students spoke of scholars’ bracelets with pride. They receive the bracelets during the Community Circle meetings held Friday from 1 - 2 p.m. When students achieve better than 85% at the end of a six week marking period, make honor roll or show vast improvement, they receive the scholar’s bracelets.

Benchmark 1F: The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.

The school has strategic, school-wide professional development that is also responsive to individual teacher needs. Professional development at Leadership Village Academy begins in August. During this month, teachers revisit the vision and the goals of Village Academy. They also participate in collaborative unit planning and work groups for course structure, lesson planning, and school culture. Teachers spend much time steeped in student data, classroom routine, and curriculum refinement.

The inspection team found that Leadership Village Academy has begun to address previous inspection concerns about the ad hoc nature of its professional development. The professional development calendar reflected sustained professional development occurring every other Friday with the sister campus. The team noted that backward planning appeared on the professional development calendar and sessions on this topic have occurred over time. Alternate Fridays are considered teachers’ time, and teachers stay late on Tuesday evenings for weekly “Workout” sessions that are essential to address issues about culture and to solve problems together.

On the Fridays that professional development occurs, the school alternates the mathematics and reading professional development with ongoing data conversations. The content for professional development is informed by teacher surveys and administrator input.

Lesson study, a translation of the Japanese term, *kounaikenshuu*, is a teacher directed form of professional development that takes place during a unit of study. There are six to thirteen meetings surrounding the first and second teaching of the research lesson. Teachers engaging in lesson study write, teach, revise, and debrief the research lesson. This is the central form of professional development for the school’s mathematics teachers from September to May.

Teachers are quite positive about Lesson Study, acknowledging that it takes quite a bit of time, but they feel they are creating quality curriculum that will last for those that may come behind them. During the central component of lesson study, a lesson is presented to students and observed by other campus staff and teachers at Leadership Village Academy. The observers then critique the lesson, modify it, discuss content, and instruction. Teachers spoke of being observed by fellow Village Academy staff, community members and other schools.

Professional development is highly individualized. The mathematics and English language arts directors meet with teachers twice a month. Individual professional development plans are in use and center around observations based on a writing/reading observation tool. The inspection team noted the comprehensive nature of the tool, observing a completed rubric and the corresponding write-up. This strategy provides focused, individualized professional development targeted at self-identified teacher needs. Individuals are also encouraged to visit other schools noted for best practices and to attend nationally recognized conferences.

In summary, the professional development at Leadership Village Academy begins in the month of August before the school year for students begins. Teachers spend time reviewing culture, philosophy, lesson plans and curriculum. Professional development continues during the year every other Friday. Lesson study is used in mathematics, and the school has some of the highest mathematics proficiency rates in the state. Hiring the English language arts director helps meet the need of providing individual professional development in the area of reading and classroom instruction. Professional development is still focused on mathematics and reading. Teachers mentioned a desire for more professional development in modifying IEPs, and the science/social studies teacher mentioned the need for more content area professional development.

Part 2. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability

A. Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

Benchmark 2B: The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.

The mission statement for Leadership Village Academy Charter School is as follows:

“to develop students of fine character who graduate from college and make a positive contribution to society.”

When asked the mission of the school, stakeholders are able to articulate college readiness and teaching students to be academic athletes. In addition, they mentioned key elements of the school such as the extended day and year, school uniforms, high expectations and Village Council weekly gatherings. Students, parents, staff and board members all mentioned the key elements Leadership Village Academy uses to achieve its mission.

This school's charter has implemented most of its key elements with fidelity. Coaching students to embrace the discipline required to be academic athletes was evident across all classrooms. Students received gentle reminders about body posture and position when working independently or facing a peer who was speaking. Much homework is required of the students, and parents must sign homework planners indicating that students are indeed engaging in the discipline required to be academic athletes. A number of students appeared passionate about learning, engaging in pleasure reading during the transition from one classroom to the next. Upon entering the classroom, no time is wasted. Students immediately begin work, and they work until the period ends.

Another strength of the school is the focus on high expectations for conduct and a focus on learning. Students are well behaved. As mentioned earlier, in the words of one teacher, “The discipline policy allows us to teach.” The high expectations for classroom conduct are also evident in the transition from classroom to classroom. There is silence in the hallway during transitions. Parent after parent positively mentioned the school's emphasis on conduct and focus on learning. One parent in the survey wrote, “The structure at LVA is outstanding. It allows students to be able to learn more.”

The inspection team noted a great degree of job satisfaction, thus reflecting the intent to invest in teachers. As mentioned during the board focus group, “Teachers want to be here.” Leadership Village Academy invests in teachers by building a results-driven organization where excellent educators thrive. Mathematics teachers engage in lesson study with the mathematics director. Village Academies has hired an English language arts director to work with reading teachers. “Workout,” a time when teachers are given an opportunity to work-out problems and come up with solutions, has been part of Leadership Village Academy since inception.

Finally, students feel that their school is a small village and parents are positive about the communication with the school. Families new to the school receive a three hour orientation and a home visit. The school keeps the students and parents informed of their child's progress. There are ten diagnostic periods, weekly Friday assessments, a schedule of assessments to monitor progress and inform students and parents. Families are also members of family cohort groups. One staff member is attached to each cohort group. While the board meetings are open, parents who cannot or do not make the board meetings feel they are not always informed about the board's initiatives.

B. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

Benchmark 2D: Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.

The four parents and students interviewed by the inspection team expressed overwhelming satisfaction with the school. New parents receive a comprehensive three hour orientation which includes a home visit and are assigned to a family cohort group. Every family in the school belongs to one. Every staff member is an advisor assigned to a cohort group and is responsible for maintaining contact. Cohort group meetings are held once a week. In a survey provided to families (with a response rate of 58%), seventy-two percent of the parents rated the quality of the communication from the advisor as very good or excellent. Thirteen percent rated the quality of communication good.

Parents have multiple opportunities to learn about their children's progress in the form of the diagnostic reports issued ten times a year; homework planners which they must sign; and all notices that go home with students must be signed by parents. One parent wrote, "It allows me to know what I need to enforce at home as well as keeping me alert of his grades." Parents stated the school "is like a close knit family." In fact the word "family" is seen repeatedly in the comment section of the parent survey. It appears almost as often as references to "quality education" and "good education."

During the parent focus group, a police officer who works in school safety said, "I know dangerous schools, and Leadership Village Academy is not dangerous." Parents noted that there are few behavioral problems or class disruptions and that, "Leadership Village Academy is a place where kids can learn." According to parents, manners and good behavior are celebrated and the school reinforces lessons that are taught at home.

Parents also spoke to the quality and the celebrity of the school's guest speakers. Katie Couric, Jack Welch and Richard Parsons have all been guests at Leadership Village Academy. Parents believe this contributes to the development of well-rounded kids. They want to continue with Leadership Village Academy and eventually send their children to the Village Academy High School. According to the school's Application and Admissions Summary, all current students are returning next year, and the school has a waiting list of 119 students.

Parents particularly like the fact that the school not only "celebrates nerdiness," but also helps struggling students become academic athletes. Parents and students alike mentioned the extra support in the form of having teacher phone numbers, Saturday School, after school, and SGI. There are eight mandatory Saturday Schools for all the students, not just those students with a grade C or below. The mandatory Saturday School is in preparation for the state assessment. In the words of one parent "Phenomenal! Kids get the extra help they need." One student mentioned that the teachers are all very smart.

There is no PTA at Leadership Village Academy. The school tried to have a PTA, but the parents on the PTA had a more traditional public school mindset, an "us versus them" mentality according to parents interviewed. Eventually, the PTA transformed into a Parent Involvement Committee.

When asked about what they would like to see change, one parent mentioned the need for more communication with the board and the need for parents to be used as a resource. Parents and students would like to see more of the arts included in the schedule, mentioning musical instruments

like the violin, modern languages like conversational Spanish, extra curricular activities including, but not limited to, athletic teams and clubs. Students mentioned that the day is too long and the recess is too short.

Parents and students are overwhelmingly pleased with the school. Parents like the quality of education combined with the caring, encouraging staff, that does all it can to ensure learning happens. Parents are positive about the routine and structure that promotes learning in the school. Students are convinced they are being prepared for college. However, students and parents would like to see extracurricular activities, conversational Spanish and music.

C. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

2C.1 The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals.

Leadership Village Academy Charter School has a committed and responsive board of trustees that has the capacity to support the school to achieve its mission of preparing students to graduate from college and contribute meaningfully to their families, communities and nation.

The board of trustees of Leadership Village Academy consists of seven members with expertise in finance, business, education, real estate, community outreach, and fundraising. Since the size of the board works against dividing into subcommittees, each board member focuses on the area of his or her strength when and if the need arises. For example, one board member, a college professor with expertise in the area of assessment, worked with Village Academy to design its assessment plan. The board member with a career in real estate and real estate management worked with Leadership Village Academy in finding its current site.

The board is keenly aware of the school's progress toward reaching and/or exceeding its academic and nonacademic goals. The Board stated that the principal reviews student data with teachers, the data are synthesized and compressed, and the board receives progress updates from the executive director about scores, staffing, turnover and finances quite often. These frequent updates are provided by the executive director or others who may need to report if the focus of the particular board meeting changes. The board, however, was clear to point out that day-to-day management of Leadership Village Academy is the responsibility of the school, not the board. The board also exhibited a deep understanding of the school's mission, referencing the school's goal to ensure that students are prepared to be "academic athletes" who graduate from college and effectively impact their communities. One board member stated that this is achievable because, "We test kids all the time, every week, and follow the students. It is a very rigorous program for each teacher to know the subject matter, the students, and the progress."

The board is quite proud of the school's academic achievements, ongoing commitment to maintaining a college-going culture, and transformative focus on creating academic athletes, stating that after the first year, students start wanting to learn and that students are on the path and they are not coming off of it. The board spoke to the issue of higher order thinking, acknowledging that the school has chosen to focus on developing reading, mathematics, homework completion, and attendance. There is a sense that in the higher grades, there will be a greater focus on critical thinking.

There are several challenges facing the board at the current time. The board serves as the board for both Village Academy schools, and this has presented a challenge because the board has to hold separate meetings for the schools. Another area of challenge is improving English language arts. “In the broader sense,” a board member said, “it has been successful, but bringing in a new director of English language arts should improve this.” “There is no particular reason students should perform in math and not reading, so as a board we saw that, had discussions, and looked for what we missed or overlooked.” The Board took, in their words the “classic solution.” It looked at best practices across charter schools, and in the end hired a specialist in English language arts. Another challenge is that there is no formal tool used to evaluate the performance of the executive director. The executive director is evaluated on the success of the school based on data and teacher turnover, but the team noted that while these are key measures, there should be a more formalized review. A final challenge is increasing parental involvement at the board meetings. Parents spoke to this as well mentioning that they wanted the board to communicate more with them so that they could be made aware of board initiatives.

The board is a well-informed, involved board, and quite proud of the academic achievement of the school. The board uses its expertise effectively to meet the needs of the school, knowing that it faces many challenges as the school grows. While there is a community outreach person on the board, the board has not been successful in drawing parents to board meetings and parents mentioned wanting to know more about the board initiatives.

VI. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

Leadership Village Academy Charter School provides high quality instruction across all classrooms. Instruction is supported by an effective system of assessment, which allows teachers and school leaders to use data to improve instruction and provide supports in a regular manner. There is an ongoing curriculum revision process which is owned by the teachers. Overall, the academic program is yielding results, and this is a result of the school's careful design.

While the school leaders ensure that teachers use state standards, assessment data and certain instructional routines, they have a loose oversight of specific pedagogy and curriculum development. As long as the students are performing at a high level, teachers have the freedom to create their own lessons and curricula. At the same time, the school uses lesson study to intensely construct and deconstruct lessons and learn from them. There is also a detailed observation rubric, but this is mainly used for teachers who ask others to observe their practice and give feedback

There is a cohesive, systematic, and comprehensive data management system for generating, collecting, compiling, and analyzing formative and summative assessment data. This data informs the multiyear curriculum development and refinement process. It also informs the monthly and weekly scope and sequence documents as well as the selection of reading level material, the creation of flexible, homogenous intervention groups, and short-lived, in-class heterogeneous pairings. In addition, there is on-going reflection and discussion around the efficacy and responsiveness of the school's assessment system.

The school is still developing in a few areas. The school recognizes that they are not presently teaching higher-order thinking across classrooms. Special education continues to be a weakness of Leadership Village Academy. Modification guidance is informal, and teachers mentioned the need for professional development in modifying lesson plans and adjusting student work expectations to align with IEP goals. The school has begun to address previous concerns about the ad hoc nature of its professional development. The inspection team noted a professional development calendar with sustained themes. Village Academies has also hired an English language arts director who delivers professional development, among other duties, to large groups and individual teachers. There is, however, a need for professional development in working with students requiring special education services and/or programs.

Overall, the academic program is functioning very well. In spite of the areas for improvement, the quality of instruction, the curriculum creation and the assessment and data management system all support teaching and learning. The school has a clearly defined model of where they hold tight (standards, assessment) and where they allow greater freedom and creativity (pedagogy, instruction), and this is working well.

Organizational Viability

The school has established a strong and unique culture of achievement. There is a careful selection process for new team members, and the fact that all teachers returned from last year is an indication of a culture that is working. This culture is also framed by systems of support for instruction, including assessment and curriculum revision systems as well as the behavior management systems. The school has a very solid understanding of its key elements and a strong culture. Stakeholders in the Leadership Village Academy Charter School community understand and embrace the overall vision and mission of the school.

Although the board of trustees of Leadership Village Academy Charter School is small (7 members), it is a committed and responsive governing body. Individuals perform the work of subcommittees on this small board, adding their specific expertise (in education, finance, real estate, legal matters) to specific school initiatives. The board is keenly aware of the school's progress toward reaching and/or exceeding its academic and nonacademic goals, and reviews school performance data frequently. As reported by both the board members and school leadership, the board is careful to govern and leave the day-to-day management to the school leaders.

Leadership of Village Academies has identified future challenges and is planning for improvements. One example of this is the intentional shift from lower to higher order thinking skills. The English language arts director spoke about the current efforts of backward planning as well as a future strategy for incorporating higher order thinking skills.

Leadership at the school is also diffused throughout the building and at the time of the visit the succession from one principal to the next was viewed as a positive step for the Village Academies Network as well as the school. The executive director conveyed to the inspection team that Leadership Village Academy is interested in "developing systems that bring out the best in people," and that this is measured by student performance. Teachers in focus groups felt this empowerment and that they were "building curriculum and building the school all the time." The current principal is transitioning to a leadership role within the Village Academies Network, Inc. and the current assistant principal is taking over the principalship of Leadership Village Academy. Constituents in the school understood the rationale for these changes as the school and the network grows, and they were clear about the carefully planned transition.

The organizational systems as well as the leadership structure provide evidence that the organization is viable. Teachers, school leadership and board members continually referenced systems and structures to ensure that the school could continue to improve.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

Category	Report Section (Relevant Benchmark(s))	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	School Performance Review (Renewal Benchmark 1.A)	Developed by Institute
	School Educational Program Review (Renewal Benchmarks 1.B – 1.F)	Classroom observations; Interviews; Review of documents and student work
Organizational Viability	School’s Mission and Vision (Renewal Benchmark 2.B)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations
	Student and Parent Satisfaction (Renewal Benchmark 2.D.1)	Interviews; Review of school documents, including the Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Board of Trustees’ Systems (Renewal Benchmark 2.C.1)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations