



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

External Evaluation Report of KIPP Tech Valley Charter School

2007 – 2008

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KIPP Tech Valley 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 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 KIPP Tech Valley Charter School was conducted on April 29 and 30, 2008, by an independent team of experienced educators from Class Measures of Stoneham, Massachusetts. Class Measures was assisted by Clarus Group of Hanover, Massachusetts. The Class Measures team included:

- **Peter Davies** is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He was formerly an administrator with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and a visiting professor to the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies. He has trained and monitored the work of Examiners for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability. He holds a Master of Arts degree from Cambridge University and an advanced graduate degree in educational administration from London University.
- **Melanie Gallo**, *Lead Inspector*, has been an educator for 35 years. A member of the National School Reform faculty, she has been a teacher and a school director. She has been a founder of two schools: a school in New Hampshire and a charter school in Massachusetts. She has been recognized by the College Board for excellence in teaching AP English and is the author of *Senior Project in Creating the Good High School* by Mackin/Silva. She is a trained Critical Friends coach and has served on the Board of the Massachusetts Drama Guild. She is currently on the graduate school adjunct faculty at Fitchburg State College. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Master's degree in Education from Fitchburg State College. She is at present a Leadership Consultant for Class Measures.
- **Thomas Petray** has over 33 years of experience working as a teacher, administrator, or consultant in public and private schools, at the university level, and at the state level. Recently, he completed his second year working as a District Examiner for The Office of Educational Quality & Accountability in Massachusetts. He has 12 years of experience working as a teacher or faculty associate with students of grades 2-6 in several public and private schools in San Antonio, Texas. In addition to his teaching experience, Tom has administrative experience serving over the course of 20 years variously in university or public schools as an assistant director, administrative aide, assistant principal, principal, and assistant to the superintendent. As principal of a large, urban, bilingual/ESL cluster school for 7 years in San Antonio, he led the faculty in significantly closing achievement gaps across all sub-populations. He implemented school-wide initiatives in reading and math in Texas and in school environment in Massachusetts with broad faculty support. Tom received his B.A. in Education and his M. Ed. in Educational Administration from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio.
- **Jeanne Simons**, *Report Writer*, is a leadership consultant with a specialization in mathematics. She worked previously as a high school mathematics teacher and in mathematics reform in urban school districts as a Targeted Mathematics Specialist with the Massachusetts Department of Education. She has experience in the development of coaching programs, effective differentiation, assessment and the formative usage of data, and in developing and providing professional development for teachers and leaders

across a variety of reform topics. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the California Institute of Technology and a Masters of Education in Mind, Brain and Education from Harvard.

- **Gugulami Zondi**, *Research Assistant*, assisted the team in gathering evidence of student attitudes and school culture.

Clarus Group provided inspection planning, quality assurance, and report review and editing services. The Clarus Group team included:

- **F. Daniel Ahern, Jr.** is the President of Clarus Group, a consulting firm dedicated to helping governments and nonprofit organizations meet high standards of performance and integrity. Together with Class Measures, Clarus Group has conducted numerous charter school renewal inspections in Massachusetts and New York, and has evaluated the New Hampshire charter school program. Clarus Group has also revised the Massachusetts charter school inspection protocol, application, and report template. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, Dan served for ten years as the First Assistant Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. He has also been a performance auditor for the Virginia General Assembly and an independent consultant to state agencies in Massachusetts and Virginia. He has taught graduate courses in nonprofit management and public administration at Northeastern University and Clark University. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northeastern University.
- **Pamela Bloomfield** is the Vice President of Clarus Group. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, she served for ten years as the Deputy Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General., where she led several major reviews of Massachusetts charter schools. She has also been the Assistant Director of Finance and Administration for an Oregon county; a management consultant assisting federal, state, and local government agencies; and a course assistant teaching written and oral communications at the Harvard Business School. She currently serves on the Board of Editors of *Public Administration Review* and on the Board of Directors of a local nonprofit organization. She holds a Master of Public Administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Smith College.

As noted above, the Third-Year External Inspection team used the QEBs, a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks, as the guides for its evaluation. In addition, the inspection 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 inspection team reviewed the school’s documents, including its annual *Accountability Plan Progress Report*, reports from previous site visits by the 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 inspection 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 KIPP Tech Valley Charter School (“KIPP Tech Valley”) on January 27, 2004, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on March 23, 2004. The school opened in August, 2005 following a planning year in 2004-05 with an initial enrollment of 87 students in fifth grade, and added one grade in each of the next two years, enrolling 210 students in fifth through seventh grades in 2007-08. The school plans on adding eighth grade in 2008-09 with a maximum anticipated enrollment of 360 students.

The board of trustees of KIPP Tech Valley Charter School, at the time of the visit, was comprised of the following individuals:

- John P. Reilly, President
- B. Jason Brooks, Vice President and Secretary
- Eric H. Burnett, Treasurer
- Sabrina Johnson
- P.O. Kelly R. Kimbrough
- Stephen Mancini

KIPP Tech Valley is located on the second floor of 1 Dudley Heights in Albany, New York. The school had shared this space with another charter school (Achievement Academy Charter School) in the 2005-06 school year. The Board of Trustees of KIPP Tech Valley partners with KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) National, a non-profit organization that trains school leaders to open and run academically rigorous public schools. As a partner organization, KIPP National provides the school with instructional, organizational, and operations leadership in addition to community development. KIPP National does not operate or manage the school, but rather provides services as needed.

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School’s mission statement as included in the school’s original Charter follows:

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School’s mission is to provide educationally underserved middle school students with the knowledge, skills, and character required to succeed in top-quality high schools, college, and the competitive world beyond.

Key design elements as outlined in the school’s initial Charter include:

- an academic program guided by five KIPP Pillars, which include: High Expectations; Choice and Commitment; More Time; Power to Lead; and Focus on Results;
- an extended school day and year, with additional enrichment experiences scheduled on select Saturdays;
- extended instructional time spent on English Language Arts and mathematics;
- daily enrichment periods in which students have an option of various activities, offset by mandatory physical education blocks every other day;

- mandatory four-week summer school program for all students;
- an electronic scoring system to track each student's progress towards mastering each individual KIPP and aligned New York State learning standard with monthly reports for parents, teachers, and administrators; and
- a focus on the following seven character skills, referred to in the Charter Application as the set of "Seven Virtues": Tenacity, Excellence, Adventurous Spirit, Teamwork, Respect, Self-Reliance, and Creative Expression.

School Year (200-08)

220 Instructional Days²

School Day (2007-08)

7:25 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.³

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ⁴	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2004-05	Planning Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2005-06	90	90	97	5	5	5	YES
2006-07	180	180	162	5, 6	5, 6	5, 6	YES
2007-08	270	270	210	5-7	5-7	5-7	YES
2008-09	360			5-8			

Race/Ethnicity	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0 %	0.0 %	NA	NA
Black or African American	89.0 %	66.0 %	NA	NA
Hispanic	5.0 %	10.0 %	NA	NA
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.0 %	3.0 %	NA	NA
White	6.0 %	21.0 %	NA	NA

Source: 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card
2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

² According to the school's charter, this total includes Saturday instruction approximately twice monthly and a 15 instructional days during a mandatory summer instruction for all students.

³ According to the school's charter, 7:25 to 7:55 a.m. is used as for breakfast/homeroom, while 2:50 to 3:50 p.m. and 3:55 to 5:00 p.m. is used for enrichment on alternating days.

⁴ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED School Report Card and database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

Special Populations	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District
Students with Disabilities	NA	NA	9.6 %	16.9 %
Limited English Proficient	0.0 %	3.0 %	0.0 %	4.3 %

Source: Students with Disabilities: New York State Education Department Database
 Limited English Proficient: 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card; 2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District	% of Enroll. KIPP Tech Valley	% of Enroll. Albany City District
Free/Reduced Lunch				
Eligible for Free Lunch	69.0 %	61.0 %	59.6 %	53.0 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	6.0 %	11.0 %	15.7 %	10.0 %

Source: 2005-06: New York State Education Department School Report Card
 2006-07: New York State Education Department Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1 st Year	2004-05	Planning Year	NO		NONE
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2005-06	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	NONE
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2006-07	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	NONE
Original Charter – 4 th Year	2007-08	3 rd	YES	External School Evaluation Report	

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KIPP Tech Valley systematically gathers assessment data from a variety of external and internal sources throughout the school year and uses the data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school's curriculum is clearly defined and aligned with New York State performance standards. Teachers assemble materials from the assorted sources, such as worksheets or activity guides, and compile them into a combination lesson packet/lesson plan for each day's class. The curriculum is modified weekly and even daily based upon data from external and internal assessments, including weekly assessments and daily "exit ticket" scores.

KIPP Tech Valley is guided by strong instructional leadership provided by the school director, who is responsible for the school's instruction and curriculum as well as teacher mentoring, coaching, supervision, and evaluation. In the 2007-08 school year, the school director instituted a new teacher evaluation system that is directly connected to student testing: teacher performance will be assessed based on their students' performance on the New York State Testing Program assessments, the TerraNova, and weekly school-administered assessments using those results that are available for each teacher's content area. The Third-Year External Inspection team found no evidence at the time of the inspection visit of a formal, systematic process for providing teachers consistently and routinely with feedback and support in lesson planning and classroom instruction. Rather, the school director reportedly provides coaching to teachers on an informal, as needed basis.

In most classes observed by the Third-Year External Inspection team, students were engaged in focused, purposeful activities for much of the class period. Most classes were highly regimented and followed strict protocols designed to control student behavior. Lessons were teacher-directed in nine of the 13 classes observed by the inspection team. The school has established a "paycheck" system of rewards and a formal detention policy. KIPP Tech Valley provides a comprehensive program of professional development that includes instruction in content and classroom management as well as school culture.

Consistent with its mission, KIPP Tech Valley has set high academic and behavioral standards for its student body. The Third-Year External Inspection team saw extensive evidence of KIPP Tech Valley's expectation that its students will attend college. Students interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team said that they supported the school's mission and felt that the school was preparing them for high school and college; however, they expressed negative views of the school's behavior management system, which they characterized as harsh and often unfair. Parents told the inspection team that they believed that the school's academic rigor and behavioral expectations will allow their children to succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

KIPP Tech Valley's board of trustees is comprised of seven members; each member serves a three-year term. One board member is an employee of the KIPP National organization. The two board members interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team stated that the board focuses on grade-level and school-wide test results and holds general discussions regarding assessments and possible solutions to instructional issues. They said that the board evaluates the school director's performance for the purpose of determining his bonus. The inspection team repeatedly requested a copy of the school director's evaluation for the inspection team's review; however, the evaluation was not provided to the inspection team. The board members were not fully informed regarding the school's current organization and staffing.

V. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

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

A. "School Performance Review"

Performance Summary: In 2006-07, KIPP Tech Valley's performance on all five outcome measures in English language arts and mathematics Accountability Plan goals could be evaluated for the first time. It did not come close to meeting its English language arts goal, but did meet its mathematics goal. Science and social studies goals were not applicable. The school is in good standing under the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.

English language arts: KIPP Tech Valley Charter School has not come close to meeting its English language arts goal. In 2005-06, its first year of operation, 51 percent of all 5th grade students scored at the proficient level on the state exam in English language arts. In 2006-07, 49 percent of students who had been enrolled in at least their second year were proficient. In both years the school has achieved the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB Accountability system, and outperformed the local school district. In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, in 2005-06 the school performed about the same as predicted, and in 2006-07 it performed worse than predicted. 2006-07 was the first year in which growth could be examined; in that year the 6th grade cohorts' proficiency rate on the state exam declined. Terra Nova results were not reported by the school.

Mathematics: KIPP Tech Valley met its mathematics goal in 2006-07. In 2005-06, its first year of operation, 53 percent of students were proficient. The next year this rose to 85 percent proficient. In both years the school achieved the AMO and outperformed the local school district. In 2004-05 KIPP Tech Valley performed about the same as predicted in comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide. The next year the school performed better than predicted. In terms of growth, the 6th grade cohort exceeded its target by a large margin in 2006-07. Terra Nova results were not reported by the school.

Science: No applicable in 2006-07

Social studies: Not applicable in 2006-07

No Child Left Behind: The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability System.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School



	2004-05 Grades Served: None	MET	2005-06 Grades Served: 5	MET	2006-07 Grades Served: 5-6	MET
<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.	Grades	All Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)
		2+ Years Students % (N)		2+ Years Students % (N)		2+ Years Students % (N)
	4	(0)	(0)	(0)	3	(0)
					4	(0)
			51.3 (78)	(0)	5	40.7 (81)
			(0)	(0)	6	52.9 (70)
			(0)	(0)	7	(0)
			(0)	(0)	8	(0)
	8	(0)	(0)	(0)	All	46.4 (151)
						49.1 (55)
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	PI	AMO		Grades	PI
4				5	141	122
8						

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

B. “School Educational Program Review”

- **To what extent does the school have a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning?**

The Third-Year External Inspection team found that KIPP Tech Valley systematically gathers assessment data from a variety of external and internal sources throughout the school year and uses the data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school uses the New York State Testing Program assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and social studies to evaluate the school’s progress relative to its Accountability Plan goals. In the 2007-08 school year, the English language arts assessments were administered to the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades in January, the mathematics assessments were administered to the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades in March, and the social studies assessments were administered to the 5th grade in November. In addition, KIPP Tech Valley uses the TerraNova, a national, norm-referenced test, as both a formative and a summative assessment and as a basis for comparison to students’ scores on the New York State Testing Program assessments. KIPP Tech Valley 5th grade students and any other new students take the TerraNova, during the first week of September as a pretest for reading, language, and mathematics; all 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students take the TerraNova in May as a post-test for assessing reading, language, and mathematics academic growth. The TerraNova results are scored by CTB McGraw Hill.

KIPP Tech Valley administers two external reading assessments. The school uses the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), an online, research-based assessment, as both a formative and a summative assessment. The SRI is administered to all 5th grade students at the start of the school year to establish a baseline for reading achievement, and on a quarterly basis thereafter, and to all 6th and 7th grade students at the end of the school year. In addition, all KIPP Tech Valley students take Accelerated Reader (AR) online assessments after reading AR books that are appropriate to their reading levels. These assessments measure reading comprehension and track growth in reading skills. The Institute’s Second-Year Evaluation Report stated that the school was using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA); however, the Third-Year External Inspection team found that the DRA was no longer in use at the time of the inspection visit.

According to the school director, 2007-08 was the first school year in which KIPP Tech Valley used internal, weekly English language arts and mathematics assessments that were criterion-referenced and aligned to the New York State performance standards; the school had piloted the mathematics assessments during the previous school year. The skills to be taught by teachers are listed on a pacing guide by day and week within the curriculum documents for each subject; these skills are aligned with the New York State performance standards and with the school’s curricular scope and sequence. Based on the skills taught during a given week, as listed in the calendar, school administrators and teachers develop criterion-referenced tests that include multiple choice, short response, and extended response questions. The school’s administrative team, which consists of the school director and the chief operating officer, score the tests at the end of each week of instruction; the results are used in all subjects and all grade levels to diagnose student strengths and weaknesses with respect to the tested skills and to group and/or provide remediation to students based on the tested skills. The administrative team also reviews the scores in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction provided by teachers during the previous week. The school director told the Third-Year External Inspection team that when the majority of students in a teacher’s class do not perform

well on a weekly assessment, he provides coaching to, models instructional approaches, and recommends professional development for the teacher.

According to the school director, the school also uses the weekly assessments to compute report card grades. The report card grades are based solely on the weekly assessments; information on homework compliance and student behavior is not used to calculate report card grades, nor is it provided in the report cards. However, this information is included in the weekly student paycheck reports sent to parents; these are discussed in a later section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's school culture. Student report cards also include student scores on the New York State Testing Program assessments; however, these scores are not used to calculate students' grades.

According to the chief operating officer, KIPP Tech Valley contracted with School Performance, Inc. (SPI) and an independent consultant from the Hoover Institute at Stanford University to evaluate the quality of the school's internal assessments and their alignment with New York State performance standards. SPI and the Hoover Institute consultant determined that the school's weekly assessments were accurate and that they reliably measured student performance. The evaluation compared the raw scores of 6th and 7th grade students on the New York State Testing Program assessments to students' scores on the school's internal weekly assessments for English language arts and mathematics. The chief operating officer told the Third-Year External Inspection team that this comparison showed that the scores of 6th and 7th grade students on the internal assessments were within two percent of the students' raw scores on the New York State Testing Program assessments in both English language arts and mathematics.

The Third-Year External Inspection team observed that KIPP Valley teachers used another internal assessment, "exit tickets," to assess the effectiveness of each day's instruction. Teachers issued the exit tickets, each of which contains three to five questions regarding the day's lesson, to students at the end of some lessons. Teachers reported using the results to identify students requiring re-teaching or, if many students require re-teaching, to modify the following day's lesson.

According to the school director, in order to ensure that teachers used rubrics and scored student work consistently across writing classes, teachers used the training booklet and CD-ROM provided by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for training in scoring writing rubrics. The NYSED allowed teachers to pre-score the New York State Testing Program English language arts assessment writing samples for all of their students before sending the assessments in for official scoring. When student scores were returned, teachers compared their scores with the official scores on the same writing samples. In subsequent discussions, the English language arts teachers for the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades compared the teachers' scores to the official scores and used this information to modify their understanding of how to use the New York State Testing Program scoring rubric within their teaching practices.

The Third-Year External Inspection team's review of KIPP Tech Valley's parent and student handbook and 38 samples of student work, as well as the inspection team's classroom observations, revealed that KIPP Tech Valley teachers assigned student work aligned to New York State performance standards and to the school's curricular scope and sequence. The inspection team also found that teachers used rubrics, closely matched to state writing rubrics, to evaluate daily student classroom work. Teachers interviewed by the inspection team stated that they felt that using the aligned writing rubrics allowed them to be more consistent in evaluating student work.

When the Third-Year External Inspection team asked teachers about the use of assessment data to improve student achievement, teachers stated that they used assessment results to provide effective remediation to individual students as well as formatively to modify the curriculum on a weekly basis to address student needs. For example, one teacher told the inspection team that after receiving weekly assessment data from the enrichment and remediation coordinator, this teacher had worked in class with individuals or small groups to provide them with thorough mini-lessons targeting each student's individual skills. Teachers told the inspection team that after they had reviewed assessment data and provided remediation to individual students, the TerraNova English language arts scores for 7th grade students had increased by 26 percent from the 2006-07 school year to the 2007-08 school year. Standardized test scores and scores from weekly assessments were the primary basis for student promotion to the next grade, according to teachers interviewed by the inspection team and the school director. The school retained students if they did not achieve passing scores on internal assessments.

With regard to communication with the parents and guardians to discuss students' progress, teachers told the Third-Year External Inspection team that they contacted most parents by telephone. Teachers reported that they each made at least one phone call to a parent of a KIPP Tech Valley student each evening to discuss the student's progress. Teachers reported that they contacted every parent at least once over the course of two months. Some parents requested phone calls to keep track of their children should their child's grades drop below a certain number. Overall, teachers reported, and parents interviewed by the inspection team confirmed, that they held regular parent/teacher conferences to discuss student progress. Members of the board of trustees interviewed by the inspection team stated that the school does not communicate whole-school test results to parents.

- **To what extent does the school have a clearly defined and aligned curriculum? Does the school use its defined and aligned curriculum to prepare students to meet state performance standards?**

KIPP Tech Valley has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses the curriculum to prepare students to meet New York State performance standards. The Third-Year External Inspection team found that the school's weekly assessments include items drawn from standardized assessments used by several states, including New York and Massachusetts, are aligned with New York State performance standards, and are integrated into the school curriculum.

The Third-Year External Inspection team reviewed curriculum documents provided by the school for English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. For each subject area, the curriculum documents contained a scope and sequence, with the exception of the writing curriculum, which were aligned to New York State performance standards, and identified the knowledge and skills to be learned over the course of the year. The curriculum documents for English language arts and mathematics included weekly assessments that were tightly aligned to the New York State performance standards and the scope and sequence for the subject area.

The Third-Year External Inspection team learned from the school director and teachers that English language arts, social studies and science teachers are provided with many resources from which to select lesson materials; teachers did not generally use any one resource exclusively. For English language arts, the resources provided for the Third-Year External Inspection team's review included Step Up to Writing, Intermediate and Secondary Levels and Wordly Wise. The inspection team also viewed the school's substantial English language arts resource library, which is accessible to all

teachers. English language arts teachers interviewed by the inspection team indicated that they have substantial autonomy in developing their lessons, that they use materials from the Scholastic Guided Reading program and the Writing Workshop and that the school's administration allows them to purchase numerous additional materials to support the development of the English language arts and writing curriculum. One teacher described creating lessons "from scratch" using library and online resources. The Second-Year Evaluation Report found that the school's writing curriculum was largely undeveloped; the Third-Year External Inspection team found that the school continues to lack an effective scope and sequence for the writing program. The teachers expressed the view that the English language arts curriculum would be strengthened if they were provided with a school-wide model for reading and writing instruction.

For mathematics, the resources provided by the school included Saxon Math Course 2, Volumes 1 and 2 and KIPP Math 5th and 6th Grade. Teachers reported to the inspection team that they use a wide variety of other resources, including materials developed at other KIPP schools and online resources. Foundational materials for the school's science curriculum consist of Science Explorer and Physical Science, both by Pearson Education. The social science curriculum uses History Alive! America's Past. Both the science and social studies programs rely heavily on a variety of resources beyond these texts.

Although some of the curricular documents for mathematics reviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team specified resources or units to be used during each specified period of time, the curricular documents for the other subject areas did not. The inspection team learned that teachers are expected to use the school's scope and sequence, as well as associated standards and assessments, to develop a standards-based lesson plan for each day.

The school has one subject teacher at each grade level; each teacher, in cooperation with the school director, reviews the curriculum documents for the teacher's grade and subject. Teachers reported to the Third-Year External Inspection team that these reviews enable them to suggest alterations to components of the curriculum documents. They also noted that the curriculum documents are reviewed during the summer professional development program provided to teachers. Although teachers reported that there is little specific effort to align the school's curriculum between grades, the Third-Year External Inspection team found that the school's curriculum was vertically aligned because the curriculum was aligned to the New York State performance standards.

According to the teachers interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team, teachers assemble materials from the assorted sources, such as worksheets or activity guides, and compile them into a combination lesson packet/lesson plan for each day's class. (These are referred to as "lesson packets" in the discussion that follows). The Third-Year External Inspection team reviewed these materials for each class observed by the inspection team and found that teachers rigorously adhered to and used the materials contained in the lesson packets. These materials frequently included objectives, skills, and lesson timing on the covers of the lesson packets. The lesson packets were, for the most part, aligned to the curriculum; however, teachers reported inserting materials that were not aligned with that week's pacing guide when remediation is required for topics previously covered but not yet mastered (as determined by the weekly assessments) by many students in the class. The inspection team observed that this approach sometimes produced lesson packets that included materials intended for the beginning and end of the lesson that were not aligned to the pacing guide or body of the lesson. For example, the lesson packets sometimes included worksheets designed to spiral back on subjects addressed earlier in the year but not yet mastered by a number of students in the class.

The Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report noted that teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the scope of their responsibilities for selecting resources, developing curricular materials, and designing learning activities for their students. Teachers reported to the Third-Year External Inspection team that they were not given formal guidelines, other than curriculum documents providing the pacing of standards to be taught for each week, to assist them in preparing their lesson packets. However, the teachers interviewed by the inspection team expressed satisfaction with the lesson packet preparation process; they said that they did not regard this process as onerous. The teachers as well as the school director expressed the view that the lesson packets enabled teachers to avoid dependence on a specific text and allowed teachers the flexibility to design lessons tailored to their classes. Teachers told the inspection team that they received ample support in the form of one-on-one mentoring as needed from the school director.

The Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report stated that KIPP Tech Valley had not yet identified or implemented "a system for identifying and addressing the strengths and deficiencies in the school's curriculum, as implemented." The Third-Year External Inspection team found that the curriculum is modified weekly and even daily based upon data from external assessments and internal assessments, including weekly assessments and exit ticket scores. The school director provides guidance to the teachers through reviews of lesson packets on a weekly basis.

- **What evidence indicates that the school is guided by strong instructional leadership?**

KIPP Tech Valley is guided by strong instructional leadership provided by the school director, who is responsible for the school's instruction and curriculum as well as teacher mentoring, coaching, supervision, and evaluation. The school director is assisted by the chief operating officer, who is responsible for data analysis. The Second-Year Evaluation Report stated that, consistent with its charter, KIPP Tech Valley employed a co-leadership model that included the school director and chief operating officer; the school director focused on teaching and learning, while the chief operating officer focused on financial and operational issues. The Third-Year External Inspection team found that this division of responsibilities remains in place; however, the chief operating officer reports to and is evaluated by the school director, according to an organization chart provided by the school and the inspection team's interviews with the school director. The grade team leaders, enrichment and remediation coordinator, and other administrative staff also report to the school director.

The school director's stated priority is to improve student performance on the school's external and internal assessments, and the school has taken consistent action to use assessment data to achieve this priority. This priority is consistent with the school's Accountability Plan goals. As previously discussed in the sections of this report that concern KIPP Tech Valley's assessment program, teachers use the results of standardized assessments and internally developed assessments to identify students requiring remediation; they are also required to assess the effectiveness of their daily instruction through the use of exit tickets. Teachers reported to the Third-Year External Inspection team that they provide interventions for individual students and modify their lesson plans based on the results of these assessments.

According to the administrative team, KIPP Tech Valley's teacher evaluation process has changed each year since the school's inception. They reported that in the first year, the school used a traditional checklist model; in the second year, teachers were evaluated based on eight domains of

professional practice: student centered instruction, assessment of student progress, classroom management, professional communication, professional development, compliance with policies, parent contact, and school-wide contribution. The rubric for this system rated teacher performance on each domain based on the following categories: exceeds expectations, proficient, below expectations, and unsatisfactory.

In the 2007-08 school year, the school director instituted a new teacher evaluation system that is directly connected to student testing: teacher performance will be assessed based on their students' performance on the New York State Testing Program assessments, the TerraNova, and weekly school-administered assessments using those assessment results that are available for each teacher's content area. According to the school director, evaluations will be based solely on the progress of students in each teacher's classroom as shown by students' performance on assessments; no other factors, such as pedagogy, will be considered. No evaluations have yet been completed under the new evaluation system.

Three times each year, each teacher is videotaped during a 90-minute class; the teacher then meets with the school director to review the videotape. Teachers interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team stated that following these videotaped sessions they receive a written review as well as oral feedback at the end of the process. According to the school director, the videotape is not intended as a formal evaluation tool; rather, this process is intended to provide support to teachers. He said that the focus of the observation is predetermined through previous discussions between the school director and the teacher; for example, observations often focus on pacing, classroom management and techniques for eliciting higher-order thinking in students.

The school director told the inspection team that discussions with teachers regarding the videotapes, along with his classroom visits and reviews of lesson packets provided to students, allow him the opportunity to provide individual support to teachers based on each teacher's specific needs; for example, he may decide to work with one teacher on lesson packet development, model a lesson for another teacher, and send a third teacher to a professional development conference. The inspection team reviewed the form used to provide written feedback to teachers and found it to be very basic: it did not include a rubric indicating the standards by which teachers were evaluated and otherwise lacked the depth of pedagogical analysis that would optimally provide a rich analysis of the teacher's classroom approach.

The Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report found that the extensive instructional support provided by the school director to teachers who were new to the school reduced the school director's availability to help other teachers improve their instructional techniques. The Third-Year External Inspection team found that the school director continues to provide extensive instructional support to new teachers; for example, one teacher told the inspection team that the school director modeled instruction in her classroom for three consecutive weeks when she first began employment and then observed her and gave her feedback. However, other teachers interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team also said that they received extensive instructional support from the school director as well as other school staff, primarily in the form of informal, open-door peer observations. The school director reportedly provides this instructional support through coaching to teachers on an informal, as needed basis. The inspection team did not find evidence of a formal, systematic process for providing teachers routinely and consistently with structured feedback and support in lesson planning and classroom instruction. Again, although the school's organization includes grade-level team leaders, the inspection team found no evidence of a formal, systematic process for these team leaders to provide coaching or support to teachers.

The Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report found that KIPP Tech Valley was experiencing significant levels of teacher turnover. According to school records reviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team, the teacher attrition rate in the 2006-07 school year was 23 percent among 5th grade teachers and 30 percent among 6th grade teachers. According to the school director, teachers have left the school in the past because of poor fit with the school, because they felt the workload was excessive, or because they felt the school day was too long. The school director told the inspection team that the school has attempted to reduce the teacher turnover rate by paying stipends for some extra curricular activities, such as basketball and by making such activities optional for teachers. He also indicated that because weekly assessments have now been developed for all core subjects, teachers are better able to focus on designing classroom lessons and lesson packets.

The school director told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the school's budget enables the school to hire several new teachers in December, when other schools are not competing for teacher candidates. The purpose of this early hire is to allow the teacher and the school director to work together and to ensure each teacher is a good match for the school. According to the school director, new teachers are hired through graduate schools, job fairs, and staff recommendations. Although the Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report stated that the KIPP Tech Valley had hired a full-time teacher recruitment specialist to carefully screen and identify highly capable and committed teaching candidates, the Third-Year External Inspection team found that the school does not employ a full-time teacher recruitment specialist.

- **Is high quality instruction evident throughout the school?**

The Third-Year External Inspection team visited classes taught by 13 classroom teachers. The classes observed included two general English classes, three mathematics classes, one reading class, one writing class, two science classes, and four history/social studies classes. Five were 5th grade classes, three were 6th grade classes, and five were 7th grade classes. Inspection team members spent a minimum of 30 minutes and an average of 50 minutes observing each class; in four classes, inspection team members remained for the full 90-minute period. The average number of students in the classrooms observed was 18. Four of the inspection team's classroom observations were followed by individual interviews of the teachers.

Teachers demonstrated subject-matter competency in 11 of the classes observed by the inspection team and demonstrated particularly strong content knowledge in three of the 11 classes. However, in two of the classes observed, teachers exhibited shortcomings in this area. In one mathematics class the use of appropriate content language was weak or unclear, when using examples from astronomy to explain distance. In a history class, a grammatical error in one of the study packets in use was left uncorrected.

Lesson packets were used in all classes observed, and most contained a lesson agenda and lesson objectives. As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's curriculum, the lesson packets reviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team were aligned to New York State performance standards. In several cases, however, the Third-Year External Inspection team observed that lessons lacked internal continuity and contained activities that did not clearly relate to the lesson objective. For example, one mathematics lesson packet contained materials covering several topics in addition to and unrelated to the main lesson because the teacher

was reviewing previously covered topics. Because of the widely diverse nature of the lesson activities, the lesson lacked a clear focus.

In most classes observed, students were engaged in focused, purposeful activities for much of the class period. The classes were orderly, and the students were responsive to behavioral expectations of the teachers. Most classes were highly regimented and followed strict protocols designed to control student behavior. Students who were not attentive were made to stand behind their desks for part or all of the class period; the inspection team observed one student who was required to stand for the entire 90-minute block. Students complied with these strict behavioral expectations. In the inspection team's interviews with students, discussed in a later section of this report that concerns student satisfaction with the school, students expressed strong displeasure with the school's strict behavioral controls.

The Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report found that the quality of instruction varied from classroom to classroom and that "many of the lessons were designed to develop students' ability to quickly identify, recall, and describe concepts or ideas at the expense of providing opportunities for students to deepen understanding or develop other critical thinking skills." The Third-Year External Inspection team found the latter to be the case in nine of the 13 classes observed. In these nine classes, learning was teacher-directed. Teachers' delivery of the lesson became monotonous; student participation was low; teachers used limited, procedural questioning with insufficient prompting and wait time to engage students at higher levels of thinking; and there were no opportunities for students to learn by doing or to work with their peers in paired or group activities. In the classrooms in which instruction was most heavily teacher-directed, the inspection team observed that students tended to become restless, especially towards the end of the long 90-minute period. During the latter half of such lessons, as many as half of the students in the class appeared disinterested. While they continued to behave well, they did not respond to teacher requests to follow the dialogue or line of questioning using the SLANT (Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer questions, Nod your head, and Track the speaker) protocol. In some cases, teachers frequently repeated their requests to comply with the SLANT protocol without receiving a sustained response from the students.

By contrast, in the four classes in which teachers used a variety of pedagogical approaches and differentiated interventions to meet students' diverse learning needs, the Third-Year External Inspection team observed that student engagement remained strong throughout the classes. In these classes, teachers asked challenging questions to provoke student problem-solving skills and assess student learning. The teachers checked for understanding through in-depth questioning of previously learned material, related learning to the students' life experiences, had a strong grasp of the content and provided depth as well as breadth of experience of the topic, asked students to summarize and synthesize material, and made good use of classroom resources.

The inspection team found that instructional time was maximized in most classrooms, with brisk transition between learning activities. Transitions were limited to preparing for the next task. In most classrooms transitions, and in many cases the tasks themselves, were timed using timers that were projected using overhead projectors.

Finally, the Third-Year External Inspection team observed that KIPP Tech Valley teachers took great pride in their classrooms and made good use of the resources available to them. White boards, desks, word walls, soft music, artwork (such as 'stained-glass' motifs on windows), student art and printed materials created stimulating environments. The classrooms observed lacked tables to facilitate group work and computers, but all teachers had and used overhead projectors and screens. Overall, the school facility was observed to be new, clean, and well maintained.

- **Does the school have 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)?**

KIPP Tech Valley's student support staff consists of an enrichment and remediation coordinator and a special education teacher. These staff told the Third-Year External Inspection team that KIPP Tech Valley provided special education and Section 504 services to eligible students; the school also provided enrichment and remedial activities to students who, based on assessment results and teacher recommendations, were identified as requiring additional academic supports. At the time of the Third-Year External Inspection visit, according to the enrichment and remediation coordinator, 13 KIPP Tech Valley students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs); 11 had been identified as learning disabled, one qualified for special education services on the autism spectrum, and one qualified as other health-impaired. Eight were 5th grade students, four were 6th grade students, and one was a 7th grade student. All 13 students had been evaluated and referred by the students' sending schools or districts. According to the enrichment and remediation coordinator, all of the school's students with disabilities were below grade level. In the 2007-08 school year, according to the student support staff, KIPP Tech Valley enrolled two students with Section 504 plans that were monitored by student support staff. The school enrolled no students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). The student support staff told the inspection team that they review Home Language Surveys to identify languages other than English that may be spoken in students' homes. For students listing languages other than English, the school conducts a more formal assessment to determine whether the students qualify for ELL assistance.

According to the student support staff, parents registering their children in KIPP Tech Valley are routinely asked whether their children have been identified as students with disabilities requiring special education programs and/or services or have Section 504 plans. Students who have not been previously identified as requiring special supports are identified when they encounter academic difficulties; in some cases, the school then learns that the students have IEPs or Section 504 plans. The student support staff provides information regarding students' IEPs and Section 504 plans to teachers at grade-level team meetings. The enrichment and remediation coordinator provided the Third-Year External Inspection team with a sample of the data table that he provided to grade-level teams regarding students with disabilities and students with Section 504 plans. The table identified the sending district; the student's name, date of birth, age, gender, grade, and special education classification; services and times for homework, math, and/or reading support; testing modifications; counseling and speech services required by an IEP; medical issues; and special transportation. Student support staff also provide detailed oral information to teachers regarding student accommodations during grade-level team meetings.

To meet the needs of students requiring special education programs and/or services, KIPP Tech Valley provides "push-in" services in the classroom whenever required by a student's IEP and testing accommodations as necessary. In the 2007-08 school year, according to the school director, 5th grade students with disabilities requiring special education programs and/or services were clustered in certain classes because of scheduling issues and the need to better meet required student accommodations; 6th and 7th grade students with disabilities were not clustered.

KIPP Tech Valley's enrichment and remediation coordinator told the Third-Year External Inspection team that she gathers student progress information from classroom teachers prior to IEP meetings, attends the IEP meetings, and sets up student behavior plans that inform staff on proper procedure for addressing behavior issues with individual students with disabilities. She also convenes Individual Student Support Team meetings when necessary to assist students requiring special education programs and/or services whose performance is of concern to teachers. The enrichment and remediation coordinator reported having modified the school's "paycheck" behavioral system, discussed in a later section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's school culture, for some students with disabilities. The modification included the addition of individualized point sheets for students who needed immediate behavioral reinforcements.

KIPP Tech Valley obtains some special education services from sources outside the school. The Albany City School District provides counseling, speech, and language services for identified students with disabilities and other students under contract to the school. School psychologists from the Albany City School District also complete evaluations for any students who might be referred by KIPP Tech Valley.

KIPP Tech Valley provides several options to meet the needs of students for academic enrichment or remediation. According to the enrichment and remediation coordinator, teachers and the student support staff jointly review the results of weekly internal assessments in order to modify the curriculum as needed and to identify students requiring enrichment or remedial support; he then assists teachers in assigning students to intervention activities. The remediation groups are structured according to relative need: some students receive in-class support during independent work time; some students are assigned to a remediation group during a study hall, tutoring class, or free period; and some students attend after school help sessions called "Wall Street." Student assignments to enrichment or remediation interventions are usually temporary and change as student needs change. Students needing remediation who had not earned Saturday field trips by demonstrating positive behavior are sometimes assigned to Saturday remediation sessions (discussed below). Teachers also recommend students for interventions after remediation strategies with these students in their classrooms proved unsuccessful.

Approximately once each month, KIPP Tech Valley holds mandatory Saturday school sessions that are intended to engage students in fun academic activities as well as fun non-academic activities such as swimming, martial arts, dance, art, step, soccer and basketball. KIPP Tech Valley also operates a mandatory summer program for all students that is intended to immerse students, particularly those new to the school, in the school's culture and provide some remediation. The summer program also includes assessments in English language arts, mathematics, social science, and science as well as reinforcement of basic concepts within these areas based on the needs identified by the assessments.

According to the enrichment and remediation coordinator, student support staff conducted a half-day training at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year and a shorter training later in the year in order to assist classroom teachers in understanding and coordinating the interventions and services available to at-risk students.

- **To what extent does the school's culture allow and promote a learning environment?**

KIPP Tech Valley has established a culture that is built on high academic and behavioral expectations. Prior to enrolling in KIPP Tech Valley, according to the school director, each student receives a home visit from the school's community liaison who outlines and explains the school's expectations for KIPP Tech Valley students and their parents.

All KIPP Tech Valley teachers, parents/guardians, and students are asked to sign a document entitled "KIPP Commitment to Excellence." Teachers commit to actions that include working at the school during specified hours during the week and on Saturdays; teaching at KIPP Valley Tech during the summer; teaching "in the best way we know how" and promoting student learning; making themselves available to students, parents, and colleagues; and protecting student safety and rights. Parents/guardians commit to actions that include making arrangements for their children to attend school during scheduled hours during the week, on Saturdays, and during the summer; helping their children "in the best way we know how" and promoting student learning; making themselves available to support their children's education, allowing their children to participate in field trips, ensuring that their children comply with the school's dress code, protecting student safety and rights. Students commit to actions that include attending school during specified hours during the week, on Saturdays, and during the summer; working, thinking, and behaving "in the best way I know how" and committing to learning; completing homework; communicating with teachers; accepting responsibility for their actions; respecting and supporting their classmates; complying with the dress code; and following teachers' directions.

KIPP Tech Valley has established a "paycheck" system of rewards. Each Friday, students receive a "paycheck" that reflects their earnings from the week. Students earn \$9 per day for attending school and making good choices. Teachers award students "ganas dollars" for making good choices and will deduct these dollars for making poor choices; a designated student records the dollars earned by each student in each classroom. Paychecks can accumulate to \$50 or decline to zero. Each week, each student's paycheck earnings begin again from zero. Students can spend their earnings at the school store and earn trips and other special events by reaching certain paycheck levels. According to the school director, the school's paycheck policy for 7th grade students differs from its policy for students in the lower grades: 7th grade students are able to earn "respect," entitling them to independent activities such as moving through the school's hallways without a pass and spending time in the school's "respect" lounge area. The school has established an appeals procedure that students who disagree with their paychecks can follow. KIPP Tech Valley's parent and student handbook explains the paycheck system and the nonnegotiable behavior expected of each student, although the handbook does not explain in detail the procedure for earning increments of "respect." The Third-Year External Inspection team observed the paycheck system in operation during the inspection team's classroom observations.

KIPP Tech Valley also enforces a formal detention policy called "perch" to discipline grade students who repeatedly make poor choices. According to the parent and student handbook, "poor choices" encompass a number of areas, including lack of homework compliance, inattention in class, and misbehavior in the hallways. Students on perch are required to wear white shirts that indicate their perch status; they attend all instruction but must spend their lunch periods and study halls separated from, and without any interaction with, other students. The school director told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the school has suspended three or four students but that no student has been expelled.

The Third-Year External Inspection team's classroom observations revealed that low-level misbehavior is not tolerated at KIPP Valley Tech. The Second-Year Evaluation Report noted that "teachers new to the school did not yet demonstrate mastery of the school's approach to classroom management." The Third-Year External Inspection team did not find this to be the case. All teachers observed by the inspection team had command of the language of the school's discipline process and used the techniques outlined in the parent and student handbook in a consistent manner throughout the school. Students were well behaved in all classrooms observed by the inspection team. The administrative team monitors the school's behavior management system and is able to use the paycheck data to improve behavioral programs within the school. The school director told the inspection team that the school is "picky" about the small infractions, such as note passing, so that these misbehaviors do not escalate.

KIPP Tech Valley's classroom management techniques and daily routines have established an environment in which learning is valued. The Third-Year External Inspection team observed that the school environment is safe and orderly. Parents, teachers, and students interviewed by the inspection team all confirmed that they regarded the school as a safe place. The inspection team observed that hallway behavior was rigorously controlled with students lining up in silent lines before going into classrooms; transitions were smooth and quiet during group movement within the school. School administrators, teachers, students, and parents, all commented to the inspection team on students' excellent behavior when riding on school buses. By requiring students to behave in ways that are conducive to learning, the school has created a culture that allows and promotes student learning.

- **Does the school's professional development program assist teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge?**

KIPP Tech Valley provides a comprehensive program of professional development that includes instruction in content and classroom management. The school's professional development program consists primarily of a three-week summer institute and professional development time at the end of the school day on Wednesdays; the school also provides professional development through KIPP National and other external sources. The school prepares an annual professional development plan. According to the school director, the plan is based on teachers' professional development needs, as indicated by student assessment data and the school director's classroom observations, as well as identified needs for training in school culture issues such as the school's paycheck system and discipline policy. The Third-Year External Inspection team saw no evidence that the KIPP Tech Valley undertakes a formal, systematic process to assess teachers' professional development needs or to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's professional development program to determine its effectiveness.

The Third-Year External Inspection team's review of the professional development binder provided to all teachers at the start of the 2007 summer program showed that teachers were provided with training on teaching excellence; topics included pacing, ways to begin and end a class, such as "do now" instructions and exit tickets, use of rubrics, writing activities, and strategies for encouraging higher-order thinking skills. The inspection team's classroom observations indicated many of these practices from the summer institute were being used. The program also focused on culture building, with particular emphasis on KIPP Tech Valley's mission and instructional philosophy. One new teacher told the inspection team that the summer program had helped her understand KIPP Tech Valley's culture and, in particular, had helped her learn to implement the school's behavior management program.

During the school year, teachers receive professional development every Wednesday at the end of the day; according to the school director, the content mirrors the content of the summer program. The school director also noted that teachers met at the end of each day during the opening days of school at the start of the school year; some meetings involved the entire faculty, and other meetings were held by grade-level teams. The administrative team told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the provision of professional development to teachers at the end of a full school day is not optimal for teacher development because teachers are tired; they stated that they intend to alter the schedule for the next school year to enable grade-level and subject-area teams to meet and receive professional development during the school day.

In an interview with the Third-Year External Inspection team, the school director indicated that he has occasionally brought in educational consultants for training, has developed partnerships with suburban public schools, and has sent teachers to observe good practice in classrooms in these schools. Teachers interviewed by the inspection team stated that they are able to attend KIPP professional development in other regions as well as national subject specific conferences. One teacher stated that she always received support in response to her requests to attend relevant workshops and conferences. Another teacher reported having attended the annual National Council of Teachers of Mathematics conference.

The school director told the Third-Year External Inspection team that he provides ongoing support and training to novice teachers and teachers new to the school as well as to the rest of the teaching faculty. As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's curriculum, the school's lesson plans are designed in the form of lesson packets containing objectives and worksheets for the entire lesson. All teachers are required to submit their lesson packets to the school director every Sunday evening, and he provides each teacher with feedback on the lesson packets. He said that he may, according to teacher need, model packet development and classroom pedagogy for teachers for as long as a few weeks; he then coaches teachers in creating packets for their lessons and provides them with oral feedback on their lesson packets. Although the Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report found that the school director was focusing his coaching efforts on new teachers at the "expense of providing differentiated professional development for all teachers at the school," the Third-Year External Inspection team learned from interviews with KIPP Tech Valley teachers that the school director provides professional development to all teachers. For example, one of the more experienced teachers stated that the school director routinely acted as an informal mentor to her.

Teachers also told the Third-Year External Inspection team that their classes were often informally observed by other teachers who provided them with peer support in the form of advice and discussion concerning questions or problems the observed teacher might be having in a class. The teachers expressed positive views of the peer support they received from their colleagues.

The school director stated that the school's budget is designed to support the professional development needs of their staff; teachers interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team confirmed that the school provides adequate financial support for their professional development activities.

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

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

- To what extent is the school faithful to its mission?**

KIPP Tech Valley's mission is to provide educationally underserved middle school students with the knowledge, skills, and character required to succeed in top-quality high schools, college, and the competitive world beyond." Consistent with its mission, KIPP Tech Valley has set high academic and behavioral standards for its student body. As previously discussed in the sections of this report that concern KIPP Tech Valley's assessments and instructional leadership, the school's teachers and students are held accountable for improving student performance on regularly administered assessments. Teachers are evaluated solely on the basis of the assessment results of their students, and student report cards are based solely on student performance on weekly assessments. In addition, the school has established a behavior management system that rewards positive behavior and discourages negative behavior, as previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's culture.

The Third-Year External Inspection team saw extensive evidence of the KIPP Tech Valley's expectation that its students will attend college. For example, college banners lined the school hallways, and each child's classroom was named after the teacher's college alma mater, and teachers reported to the inspection team that they were encouraged to relate their college experiences to their students. Children were identified within the school and in the classroom as being members of a specific college graduating class and, thus, identified strongly with their college graduation years. The inspection team learned that students at KIPP Tech Valley attend multiple field trips to local colleges. In fact, one parent told the inspection team that his 5th grade son had visited all of the local colleges and universities in the area; his son also knew the date that he would graduate from college.

Students are exposed to the world outside of Albany through field trips granted to students with satisfactory paycheck levels. Students in the 5th grade take field trips to New York City, where they attend a Broadway play and visit several colleges and universities, including Columbia. Students in the 6th and 7th grades students take field trips to Washington D.C and Atlanta, respectively, where they also visit colleges and universities.

All school stakeholders interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team, including school administrators, teachers, members of the board of trustees, students, and parents, were very familiar with, and expressed positive views of, KIPP Tech Valley's mission. Board members told the inspection team that they were in the process of developing supports to assist future graduates from the school in maintaining and achieving their college goals. These supports had yet to be defined but were intended to follow the students and ensure that they had the resources necessary to succeed in high school so they could go to college. The board members were also considering plans to invite future KIPP alumni who are college graduates back to the school to share their experiences with enrolled students.

Students interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team said that they supported the school's mission and felt that the school was preparing them for high school and college. Students said that they were motivated by the school's commitment to their success and that they felt confident

that their teachers would help them succeed. One student stated that since she enrolled in KIPP Tech Valley, she has understood that making the right choices today will affect her future and lead to positive results. Another student told the inspection team that teachers at the school were trying to prepare students not only for high school and college but also for life. Students also told the inspection team that teachers' strict approach to rules and discipline sometimes reduced the fun of learning.

Parents interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team were also knowledgeable regarding the school's mission. They told the inspection team that they believed that the school's academic rigor and behavioral expectations will allow their children to succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

- **Has the school implemented the key design elements included in its charter?**

The first key design element of KIPP Tech Valley's charter is "an academic program guided by the five KIPP Pillars, which include: High Expectations; Choice and Commitment; More Time; Power to Lead; and Focus on Results." The five KIPP pillars are foundational to the school's curriculum and behavioral management system and are well represented throughout the school. The school's high expectations and focus on results are evident in the school's data-driven, results-oriented approach to student achievement and in the school's behavioral system, which rewards positive student behaviors and encourages commitment to "good choices" while meting out demerits even for small infractions. KIPP Tech Valley's 90-minute instructional blocks for core subjects, its extended school day and school year (discussed below), and summer academic program provide students with more learning time than they might receive at other schools. The "power to lead" component of the school's academic program is reflected in its acknowledgement of student high achievers as role models within the school. The Third-Year External Inspection team observed awards for outstanding schoolwork posted in hallways and classrooms, and the inspection team also observed that high-performing students were allowed special privileges such as giving visitor tours.

The second key design element of the school's charter, "an extended school day and year, with additional enrichment experiences scheduled on select Saturdays," has varied from the plan outlined in KIPP Tech Valley's charter, which cited a school year of 220 instructional days. However, it is consistent with the flexibility afforded in the charter that the days and hours are not materially less than those set forth in the Application. The Third-Year External Inspection team's review of the school calendar for the 2007-08 school year showed that the school year consisted of 180 regular school days, 10 Saturdays (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.), and the summer session which varied by grade: 5th grade, 15 days; 6th grade, 13 days; and 7th grade, 10 days. Thus, the total days on which KIPP Tech Valley students were scheduled to attend school during the 2007-08 school year were as follows: 5th grade, 205 school days; 6th grade, 203 school days; and 7th grade, 200 school days.

The third key design element of the school's charter, "extended instructional time spent on English Language Arts and mathematics," has been implemented; the school provides 90-minute blocks of English language arts and mathematics instruction.

The fourth key design element of the school's charter, "daily enrichment periods in which students have an option of various activities, offset by mandatory physical education blocks every other day," has been implemented; KIPP Tech Valley students attend daily enrichment and remediation sessions as well as regularly scheduled physical education classes.

The fifth key design element of the school's charter, "mandatory four-week summer school program for all students," has not been implemented. As discussed earlier in this section, all students attend mandatory summer school; according to the school calendar for the 2007-08 school year, the summer sessions consisted of 10 to 15 days of instruction, depending upon the grade.

The sixth key design element of the school's charter, "an electronic scoring system to track each student's progress towards mastering each individual KIPP and aligned New York State learning standard with monthly reports for parents, teachers, and administrators," is being implemented. As discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's assessments, the school has an extensive system of analyzing assessment data and distributing reports on student progress to the board of trustees, teachers, and parents. According to the school director, the school has purchased an electronic scoring system and is in the process of implementing the system. This system will allow for automated scoring of test items.

The seventh key design element of the school's charter is as follows: "a focus on the following seven character skills, referred to in the Charter as the set of 'Seven Virtues': Tenacity, Excellence, Adventurous Spirit, Teamwork, Respect, Self-Reliance, and Creative Expression." The Third-Year External Inspection team found examples of most of these character skills, or virtues, in conducting the inspection visit. Tenacity and excellence are expected of students at KIPP Tech Valley in the areas of academic performance and behavior. Teamwork among all school stakeholders is encouraged by the school through the "KIPP Commitment to Excellence" signed by teachers, students, and parents.

The inspection team observed that the concept of respect was frequently invoked within the school. For example, students were reminded by teachers to be respectful, and students in classrooms sometimes expressed disagreement with other students by saying, "I respectfully disagree." As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's culture, the school's 7th grade behavioral program enables students to earn or lose "respect," based on their behavior; students who earn respect can be rewarded with participation in field trips and other benefits. The school director told the inspection team that the 7th grade behavioral program was instituted with the intention of encouraging self-reliance. The school believed that enabling 7th grade students to earn "respect" rather than paycheck dollars would help them internalize the values emphasized by the program. However, the Third-Year External Inspection team observed that all KIPP Tech Valley students, including 7th grade students, are governed by a rigorous model of rewards and punishments that are controlled and monitored by the school. Board members told the inspection team that one of their goals was to improve student self-reliance, especially as the school grows to include 8th grade students, in order to ensure students' success in high school and beyond.

Finally, the Third-Year External Inspection team saw little evidence of the "adventurous spirit" and "creative expression" character skills emphasized in the school's charter. The behavior of students observed by the inspection team was exemplary but tightly controlled by the school's behavioral system; students' adventurous spirits were not apparent. As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's classroom instruction, the inspection team observed that student responses to teachers frequently consisted of information recall rather than creative analysis. Although the inspection team saw artwork displayed in the hallways, the artwork did not reflect creative expression on the part of students. For example, the inspection team observed that students had created images of Van Gogh's "Starry Night" that appeared quite well done; however, on closer inspection, it was clear that students had colored in copies of line drawings of the painting rather than developing their own artistic interpretations.

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

- **To what extent are parents/guardians and students satisfied with the school?**

The Third-Year External Inspection team conducted a focus group of three parents of KIPP Tech Valley students in each grade level served by the school. Each of the students whose parents were interviewed had enrolled at the school beginning in the 5th grade. The parents told the inspection team that they were extremely satisfied with KIPP Tech Valley and that the school has high expectations for every student. They stated that they had chosen KIPP Tech Valley because of its longer school day, challenging curriculum, and emphasis on college graduation. They also spoke positively about the school's emphasis on student and parent accountability, noting that the school held students accountable through the paycheck system and that the school held parents accountable for monitoring their children's schoolwork by requiring parents to sign homework assignments and student agendas each day. As previously discussed in the section of this report that concerns KIPP Tech Valley's school culture, the school requires all teachers, students, and parents to sign the "KIPP Commitment to Excellence," which states the school's expectations for each group. The school's parent liaison visits each student's home before the student enrolls in the school to obtain the signature of the parent or guardian on the document. The Third-Year External Inspection team saw that these signed documents hang on the walls outside each classroom. The parent of a 7th grade student told the inspection team that her child had over time learned to hold herself accountable and that she felt that KIPP Tech Valley was preparing her child to live in the real world. One parent stated that the school could sometimes be too regimented, but that students did seem to adjust to the school's rules.

According to the parents interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team, KIPP Tech Valley maintains strong communications with parents. The school provides a cell phone to each teacher; students and parents are provided with teachers' telephone numbers and encouraged to call the teachers until 9:00 p.m. to check on homework assignments, student progress, or any other concern. The school also employs a parent and community liaison who told the inspection team that she communicates with parents by email and sends school newsletters to parents. She said that she has trained parents and students in technology safety; she has also organized special events such as the Harvest Festival and field day. The parents interviewed by the inspection team stated that they were able to call the family and community liaison for any reason, that they had volunteered for special school events through the liaison, and that the special events organized by the liaison had been fun and successful. They also stated that parent liaison responded quickly to any communication from them.

KIPP Tech Valley's school director stated that KIPP Tech Valley has administered surveys of parents and students. Although the Third-Year External Inspection team was provided with a sample of each of the surveys, no results were available. The school director told the inspection team that the survey results had not yet been compiled.

On the first day of the Third-Year External Inspection visit, Third-Year External Inspection team members were given a tour of the school by student ambassadors. These students spoke to the inspection team about their academic goals and successes since enrolling in the school, and they were able to articulate the school's academic and behavioral policies as well as the underlying reasons for the policies.

The Third-Year External Inspection team also conducted a focus group of 12 KIPP Tech Valley students: five 5th grade students, three 6th grade students, and four 7th grade students. All students had entered as 5th grade students. One student in the group had siblings in the school. These students expressed pride in their school and general satisfaction with many aspects of school life. They told the inspection team that KIPP Tech Valley is known to be the best school in their community and to have strong values. They said that their families had heard about the school and its good reputation through the community and that they had been invited to tour the school and to meet the staff at the beginning of the school year. The students told the Third-Year External Inspection team that they were pleased with their school academically and that their classes were academically challenging.

The 5th grade students praised their math and reading teachers. They said that because the students were not performing well at the beginning of the school year in these classes, their teachers had devoted more effort to helping students improve and involving them in reading quizzes to improve their vocabulary and math songs, and games to increase student proficiency in mathematics. They said that by reading different literature books, they had learned to identify settings, character, conflicts, and resolution. The 6th grade students also said that they felt challenged in their classes with one exception: they told the team that in their mathematics class they were relearning material that they already knew and, thus, the class was not enjoyable. The 7th grade students said that they felt confident and highly challenged in their classroom; they said that they sometimes used the 8th grade mathematics book in their mathematics class and that they felt this text was both overwhelming and interesting in that it deepened their thinking. There was a general consensus among the students that they learned more in groups of their peers; they stated that some teachers encouraged them to work more with their peers.

The students expressed very negative views of KIPP Tech Valley's behavior management system, which they characterized as harsh and often unfair. One 6th grade student said that his mother liked the school but did not support the 'white shirt' perch system of discipline because it makes students feel excluded from the group and focuses on bad behavior. In addition, the students did not favor the school's paycheck system. They said that they received deductions for small, simple mistakes that were sometimes not their fault and that their teachers did not always explain why deductions from their paychecks had been made. According to one 7th grade student, "the paychecks bring the school down to a level of a prison." Students told the inspection team that they would sometimes incur their parents' disapproval when their paycheck deductions prevented them from going on school field trips. The students also said that although they enjoy being in the school, the school day is too long and leaves them insufficient time to focus on homework or to relax and have fun. They said that their parents encouraged them to use their time in school profitably because they would benefit from doing so in the future.

The students told the Third-Year External Inspection team that they felt safe in the school building. They praised the extensive camera system around the school and noted that the doors are always locked and that buzzers are installed at the back doors. The students also said that one purpose of the initial tour for students and parents at the beginning of the school year was to enable the school staff to become sufficiently familiar with family members to enable them to identify the family members when they visit the school during the school year.

According to documents provided by KIPP Tech Valley, the school's student attrition rates for the 2006-07 school year were as follows: 5th grade, 12%; 6th grade, 13%.

The school director told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the school has chosen to enroll new students only in the 5th grade because doing so enables the school to maintain a strong culture and because students who have been at the school perform significantly above their peers in local schools. Because of the limitations on new enrollment, the attrition rates experienced by the school could, if they continue into future years, significantly reduce the school's 8th grade enrollment. When students leave the school, according to the school director, approximately half move out of the district, one-quarter enroll in another charter or/parochial school, and one-quarter return to their district schools.

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

- **Has the school board worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals?**

KIPP Tech Valley's board of trustees is comprised of seven members; each member serves a three-year term. One board member is an employee of the KIPP National organization, with which the school contracts for models, training, and other support materials and activities. Two of the seven board members attended the interview with the Third-Year External Inspection team; both were founders of KIPP Tech Valley. They told the inspection team that the board's membership is stable. They said that the board currently has an executive committee, a finance committee, and a board development committee; the board occasionally creates additional, temporary committees in addition to the three committees cited above. The board meets on a monthly basis but sometimes does not have a quorum, according to the board members interviewed.

The two board members told the Third-Year Inspection team that the board receives weekly updates on the academic progress of KIPP Tech Valley's students from the school director. The inspection team's review of documentation included in the board minutes confirmed that the board received written reports of assessment results; however, the documentation reviewed by the inspection team did not include a full set of weekly reports for the period reviewed. The board members told the inspection team that the board focuses on grade-level and school-wide test results and holds general discussions regarding assessments and possible solutions to instructional issues. As an example of this type of problem-solving, they cited the board's efforts over six months to develop a plan to address the school's low performance on English language arts and reading assessments during the school's first year of operations. They also told the inspection team that on one occasion, the board requested data on student attrition in response to concerns regarding student attrition rates. They cited as recent actions taken by the board the development of a draft of a wellness policy and a review of actions taken in committee.

According to the board members interviewed, the school has moved into a second stage of growth and is now focusing on the sustainability of KIPP Tech Valley and fulfillment of its mission. They said that the board's primary responsibility is to evaluate the leadership team's plans to improve the school. They also said that the board's current goals include providing career tracks for teachers to become administrators that have manageable time commitments, developing a succession plan for the school director, and determining whether KIPP Tech Valley is succeeding in its mission to prepare students for college and developing strategies for supporting students through high school and into college. The board members told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the board has not yet developed a strategic plan to implement these goals but intends to do so.

The board members interviewed told the Third-Year External Inspection team that the board evaluates the school director's performance for the purpose of determining his bonus. The inspection team repeatedly requested a copy of the school director's evaluation for the inspection team's review; however, the evaluation was not provided to the inspection team. The board members told the inspection team that the school director had hired the chief operating officer, whom they referred to as the business manager, without consulting the board. They said that the board had been displeased by this action but that the board's relationship with the school director is now very positive. The board members were not fully informed regarding the school's current organization and staffing. For example, the board members were unaware that the school employed special education staff and believed, incorrectly, that all special education services were provided by students' sending districts. They were also unaware that the school organization includes teachers who serve as team leaders for the three grades.

The board members interviewed by the Third-Year External Inspection team said that the board would like to expand its membership and has actively tried to recruit new members but that it has proven difficult to find individuals who are interested in assuming the responsibility and social stresses associated with serving as charter school board members within the community. The board holds occasional breakfasts with potential board members from the community.

VII. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

KIPP Tech Valley has developed a systematic, data-driven academic program that is supported by all school stakeholders. However, the program as structured does not provide sufficient support for the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. Although the school director provides coaching as needed to teachers, the school has not implemented a formal teacher coaching process. The school director has recently implemented a teacher evaluation system that bases teacher evaluations solely on the progress of teachers' students as demonstrated by assessment data; the school director's videotaped classroom observations of teacher instruction are not formally evaluated under the new system, nor has a rubric for evaluating teacher instruction been developed. The lack of a formalized system for evaluating and providing feedback to teachers regarding teacher instruction in the classroom limits the school's ability to develop teachers' pedagogical and classroom management skills.

In addition, KIPP Tech Valley's current approach to instruction does not promote differentiated instructional techniques to meet the needs of diverse learners or the use of alternate grouping strategies by the school's teachers. The school's strict behavioral rules appear to limit the opportunities for students to work together in groups or interact in the classroom; they also appear to limit the school's capacity to fulfill its commitment to encouraging the character skills, or "virtues," of "adventurous spirit" and "creative expression."

Organizational Viability

In the early stages of KIPP Tech Valley's growth, the school director has assumed a broad range of instructional responsibilities as well as other leadership roles. The school's teachers lack opportunities for career growth because of the school's relatively flat organizational structure. As the school continues to expand and evolve, the board of trustees confronts the challenge of reconfiguring the school's organization to support the school's long-term viability. The school director currently provides all instructional leadership and most professional development to KIPP Tech Valley teachers. The board may want to consider methods of distributing some of the school director's responsibilities to allow him to meet the needs of teachers for coaching and professional development more effectively. The Second-Year External Inspection team was told that one teacher will assume the position of vice principal in the 2008-09 school year. This new position may help to realign the responsibilities currently borne by the school director.

Finally, the Third-Year External Inspection team noted that the board members interviewed were not fully informed regarding the school's organization and staffing. Effective communications between the school director and the board will be important to the school's continued growth and viability.

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