



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2006-2007

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INTRODUCTION

Background on Charter Schools and the State University

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts; schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees which is directly responsible for school performance. That board, while independent, is subject to public oversight. Just as traditional school boards, charter school boards of trustees must adhere to New York State’s Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools and their boards are also subject to oversight and monitoring. In the case of SUNY authorized schools, that monitoring is conducted by the Institute. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its Accountability Plan, as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness within the charter period, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

The State University Trustees’ Oversight Process

The State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education

Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan (which is contained in the schools' charter itself) and other methods.

In addition to monitoring a school's compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals.

The first goal is to facilitate improvement. By providing substantive information about the school's strengths and weaknesses to the school's board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school to recognize those strengths and weaknesses. Of course, whether the school actually takes corrective actions, and more importantly, effective corrective action, remains the school's responsibility given that it is an independent and autonomous school.

The second goal is to disseminate information about the school's performance beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. Ideally this information, including the present report, should help parents make choices about whether a school is serving their children well and/or is likely to continue to do so in the future. For this reason, this report (and others like it) is posted on the Institute's website and the school is asked to inform parents of its posting. By providing parents with more information, the State University hopes to enhance the market accountability to which charters are subject: if they do not attract and retain sufficient numbers of students who want the product they are providing, they cannot survive.

The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a database of the school's progress over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute is better able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school—and the likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute and the State University Trustees are better positioned to make recommendations and a decision on whether a school's charter should be renewed. In turn, a school will also have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

Inspection Visits and Reports¹

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. This inspection report is a product of one of those visits.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit ("the Renewal Benchmarks"). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

¹ More information on the Institute's school oversight and evaluation system may be found online at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsPubsReports.htm>.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. This subset, Renewal Benchmarks 1.B-1.F, is often referred to as the "Qualitative Education Benchmarks," or "QEBs." In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the QEBs are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's 3rd - 8th grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily limited and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.²

Over time, and particularly at the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1.A, the school's progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the Qualitative Education Benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

This inspection report includes a review of academic attainment and improvement based on the school's performance on state and other assessments. The School Performance Review provides an evaluation of the school's academic achievement in the context of Renewal Benchmark 1A. Because of the timing of the release of state assessment data, the review is based on test results from the school year preceding the date of the school visit upon which the evidence for the Qualitative Education Benchmarks is based..³ The narrative refers to School Performance Summaries which follow the School Performance Review section. These one page summaries present a synopsis of the Accountability Plan outcome measures in ELA and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures in their first year of operation:⁴

- Measure 1 (absolute) shows the grade level and aggregate performance on the state test of both all students and students enrolled in at least their second year.
- Measure 2 (absolute) presents the school's Performance Index (PI) measured against the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system. The PI is derived by adding together the percentage of students at Levels 2 and above and the percentage at Levels 3 and above.

² More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

³ Not all schools will have state test results because the state only administers tests in certain grades: state ELA and math tests are administered to grades 3-8, science tests in grades 4 and 8, and social studies tests in grades 5 and 8.

⁴ In indicating whether a performance measure has been met, the summaries only present a strict, narrow accounting; they do not show whether the school came close to meeting a measure or the relative weight of each measure for gauging student progress.

- Measure 3 (comparative) compares the performance of charter school students enrolled in at least their second year to all students in the same tested grades in the local school district. For instance, a grades 5-8 charter school would compare only its grades 6-8 results to the same tested grades in the district because students in its 5th grade were only in their first year at the charter school.
- Measure 4 (comparative) compares the actual overall performance of the school to the predicted level of performance of similar schools statewide using a regression analysis based on free lunch statistics. The Effect Size is a statistical measure calculated by dividing the difference between the actual and predicted outcomes by the standard deviation difference.
- Measure 5 (value added) shows both the number of grade level cohorts that achieved their target as well as the overall performance of all cohort students combined. If the baseline is above 50 NCE, then the target is an increase of any amount.

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and inspection report, which all schools in that position receive.

As such, each of the Institute's inspection reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school. This chart is set forth in the following section.

The Present Report

The information contained within this report is the result of evidence obtaining during the Institute's visit to the school conducted in the spring of the school's second year of instruction of its first or second charter term. In addition to this introduction, the report includes a brief description of the school, conclusions and analysis from the present visit, the Renewal Benchmarks, and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the school inspectors and the date of the visit.

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two- to four-member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute's evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment) and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety it may take additional and immediate action; however, monitoring

compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit. The same is true with issues pertaining to the fiscal soundness of the school. Evaluation visits typically include an interview with the school board, the school leader, classroom visitations, in addition to the review of other school-based documents.

Keeping this Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State University and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are valid, in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school's academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use the inspection team's conclusions in planning school improvement efforts.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the inspection team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the

school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the inspection team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed *brutal honesty* is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School (KIPP Tech Valley) was approved by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York on January 28, 2004 and by the Board of Regents on March 23, 2004. Following a planning year for 2004-05 the school opened in August 2005 with an initial enrollment of 87 students in grade five. KIPP Tech Valley's original Charter Agreement calls for adding one grade each year, serving students in grades five through eight by 2008-09. The school expanded as planned by adding grade six in 2006-07 for a total enrollment of 162 students.

The school is located on the second floor of 1 Dudley Heights in Albany, New York. During the 2005-06 school year it shared facility space with Achievement Academy, while solely occupying the building in 2006-07. 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 Agreements 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 Application include:

- 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;
- 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 (2006-2007)200 days⁵**School Day (2006-2007)**7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.⁶**Enrollment**

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁷	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2004-05	Planning Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	YES
2005-06	90	90	97	5	5	5	YES
2006-07	180	180	162	5, 6	5, 6	5, 6	YES

	2005-2006	
Race/Ethnicity	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Black (Not Hispanic)	74	88.1%
Hispanic	4	4.8%
White	5	6.0%

Source: NYSED 2005-06 Database

⁵ KIPP TVCS originally proposed 220 days per school year in their original Charter Agreement; however, submitted a request for Change in Program to reduce this amount to 200 days prior to opening. This request was approved by the Institute.

⁶ The daily school schedule provides for a breakfast/homeroom period from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. and a tutorial/enrichment period from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

⁷ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2005-06 database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, cited an enrollment of 84 for 2005-06.

	2005-2006	
Free/Reduced Lunch	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	58	69.0%%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	5	6.0%%

Source: NYSED 2005-2006 Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1st 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	
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2006-07	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS EVALUATION VISIT

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a visit to the KIPP Tech Valley Charter School on March 23, 2006. Institute staff observed classrooms, met with administrators and interviewed teachers. In a letter to the school's board of trustees, the Institute reported the results of the school site visit which are briefly summarized below.

At the time of the visit, the school's teachers had developed the specific lessons/scope and sequence for his or her content area; however, the school's director indicated that KIPP Tech Valley had been very selective in the components used to direct and provide instruction, including the Readers' Workshop for reading, along with the Scholastic Guided Reading for remediation. In social studies, the school was using History Alive, while the Delta Science series was used to support science instruction. In the area of mathematics, the school used KIPP math materials in addition to Saxon Math. To develop students' writing skills, KIPP Tech Valley was relying on carefully sequenced mini-lessons from the Writers' Workshop.

In interviews with both the school's trustees and director, it was indicated that KIPP Tech Valley found it challenging to identify and hire qualified teachers. Reflecting that challenge, the teaching staff included teachers with varied levels of instructional experience and skills. Overall, the instructional staff appeared to be more adept at providing instruction in their area of content specialty, and less certain about the instructional nuances and methods relative to more general pedagogical principles.

To instill the KIPP principles and to mitigate the effects of having teachers who were trained at various teacher training institutions and in different states, the school provides ongoing professional development both formally and informally. At the time of the school's first end of year visit, much of the professional development was provided by the school's director. Although teachers clearly felt supported in their pedagogy, inspectors expressed a concern as to the sustainability of this model of professional development in which the school leader plays such a pivotal and almost exclusive role.

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School provided remediation within the normal school day for students identified through their performance on the school's value-added assessment, the Terra Nova for math and reading, as well as independently developed writing assessments. Based on their performance, students were scheduled to receive remediation as part of the daily leveled literacy reading period called "No Shortcuts." Remediation groups were formed based on the results of each 6-week assessment. Additional assistance was provided to students in writing and math.

In terms of special education, the school relied on the district to provide all special education services and programs, including a resource teacher and speech therapist, within its full-inclusion environment, and employed an outside consultant to fulfill the role of special education coordinator. As the school's enrollment increases, inspectors suggested that the school might want to consider identifying a staff member, who is New York State certified in special education, to fulfill the coordination responsibilities associated with ensuring that students with disabilities receive the programs and/or services required on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and that this staff member would be responsible for ensuring that the school's instructional staff were aware of students with disabilities in their classrooms and their IEP needs regarding instruction and assessment, materials, accommodations, or other areas.

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School had established a strong culture in which both students and staff relied on KIPP's "five pillars" for high academic achievement to increase student learning. During the first year visit, team members were keenly aware of the focused and respectful decorum of students and staff, as well as of students' understanding and commitment to meeting the expectations of school leaders and themselves. Based on observations during the visit, it was evident that children came to school ready to learn, knew the routines of the day, and had internalized the school's culture of no shortcuts.

In its first year of operation, KIPP Tech Valley Charter School had a board of trustees that was committed to the task of providing the necessary infrastructure to support student learning. Based on information received during the interview with trustees, the board had been able to focus its efforts primarily on governance and the role of the board, including addressing issues such as policy development, evaluation criteria for the school's leader, and issues regarding the facility/lease.

Consistent with its charter, the board had established a co-leadership model for the school that includes the school's director and chief operations officer, allowing the school director to focus the majority of his time and attention on teaching and learning, while the chief operations officer was responsible for providing accurate financial information and addressing operations' issues and other logistical matters.

In terms of the board of trustees' knowledge of and role in ensuring that student performance meets, or exceeds, the school's and the state's performance goals, the board unabashedly spoke the language of high expectations for both the school leader and the students. Trustees were unambiguous about using data to drive instruction, and the school leadership understood and accepted the challenge without reservations. At the time of the end-of-year visit, the board was in the process of developing more measurable criteria, and refining its expectations in terms of the reports/information it receives from the school leader regarding the school's performance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

KIPP Tech Valley has implemented a system to gather assessment data to monitor student progress toward the acquisition of skills and content knowledge, and routinely collects and analyzes student level data from its assessment program to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction. In addition, the school uses this data to address the needs of struggling learners through a variety of structured programs and strategies, including the homogeneous grouping of its 6th grade students, a daily 45 minute period of instruction called “No Shortcuts,” and after-school tutoring. The school also offers its special education students additional support through both push-in and pull-out services provided by a staff member who is a certified special education teacher.

KIPP Tech Valley has access to a curriculum framework that is based upon state performance standards (the “Superstandards”). However, in its second year of instruction, the school struggles with identifying school-wide instructional approaches to and resources for the teaching of core subject areas, including English language arts and mathematics. Furthermore, the school has not yet identified or implemented a system for identifying and addressing strengths and deficiencies in the school’s curriculum, as implemented. Over time this practice will likely result in less than desirable results in the continuity and coordination of the instructional program from grade-to-grade and year-to-year. In addition, at the time of the second year inspection, teachers indicated that they are charged with developing curricular materials and designing specific learning activities for their students while simultaneously implementing the program, leaving them feeling overwhelmed by the scope of their responsibilities.

The work of school staff is further complicated by the level of teacher turnover experienced by the school during the 2006-2007 academic year, during which three of the school’s seven core academic teachers were replaced with teachers new to the school. As a result, the school’s director has had to provide a significant level of instructional support to teachers new to the school, teaching them to implement the school’s classroom management system, supporting them in lesson planning, and even modeling instruction on a full-time basis for up to two weeks at a time.

The school director approaches his responsibilities with a great deal of involvement in day-to-day instructional activities. Teachers new to the school indicated that this intensive support has been helpful; however, other teachers noted to school inspectors that the school director’s additional responsibilities have suffered because of his heavy concentration on instructing new teachers. Taking into consideration the relative newness of many members of the teaching staff, the inspection team was not surprised to find variation in the quality of instruction from classroom to classroom throughout the school.

In terms of academic performance, 2005-06 was the school’s first year of operation. Test results for the 5th grade, the only grade served that year, essentially serve as baseline information for the charter period. About half of the students were proficient in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the state test and performing near grade level at the end of the year on the Terra Nova. In social studies, 5th grade baseline results indicate the school is close to meeting its goal. The school does not yet have testing grades for science.

KIPP Tech Valley benefits from a strong school board that analyzes a variety of data and information in fulfilling their school oversight responsibilities, and whose members clearly understand the difference between school governance and management. On the day of the visit, the two board

members present spoke knowledgably about all aspects of the school, indicating that the school board provides a high level of oversight over the school's academic program, organizational viability, and fiscal soundness. In addition, the school board has demonstrated its responsiveness to challenges facing KIPP Tech Valley.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The following review of academic attainment and improvement (Benchmark 1A) is based on assessment results and other data from the 2005-06 school year, KIPP Tech Valley's first year of operation.

Summary: As 2005-06 was the school's first year of operation, test results for the 5th grade, the only grade served that year, essentially serve as baseline information for the charter period. About half of the students were proficient in both English language arts and mathematics on the state test and performing near grade level at the end of the year on the Terra Nova. The school does not yet have testing grades for science; in social studies 5th grade baseline results indicate the school is close to meeting its goal.

English Language Arts: As 2005-06 was the school's first year of operation, none of the students were enrolled for two or more years. Approximately half of all students performed at the proficient level on the 5th grade state test. The school met the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) under the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system. It outperformed the local school district and performed about the same as predicated in comparison to similar schools statewide. On the Terra Nova reading exam 5th grade students increased from an average Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) of 42 in the fall to 50 in the spring.

Mathematics: Just over half of all students performed at the proficient level on the 5th grade state test. The school met the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) under the state's NCLB accountability system. It outperformed the local school district and performed about the same as predicated compared to similar schools statewide. On the Terra Nova math exam 5th grade students increased from an average NCE of 41 in the fall to 47 in the spring.

Science: The school does not yet have a testing grade for science.

Social Studies: Although this goal is not applicable until the school has an 8th grade, 63 percent of 5th grade students were proficient on the state exam.

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

Optional Goals: None.

Note: The following two pages present School Performance Summaries that provide data addressing the required Accountability Plan outcome measures for ELA and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures. Please refer to the "Inspection Visits and Reports" section of the Introduction for full definitions of the measures used and details about the tables themselves.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

English Language Arts

Kipp Tech Valley Charter School



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

	2003-04 Grades Served: None		MET	2004-05 Grades Served: None		MET	2005-06 Grades Served: 5		MET
	ABSOLUTE MEASURES			ABSOLUTE MEASURES			ABSOLUTE MEASURES		
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4	(0)	(0)	4	(0)	(0)	3	(0)	(0)
							4	(0)	(0)
							5	51.3 (78)	(0)
							6	(0)	(0)
							7	(0)	(0)
	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)
							All	51.3 (78)	(0)
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO
	4			4					
	8			8			5	141	122
									YES
COMPARATIVE MEASURES									
3. Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local district.	Comparison: (Albany City Schools)			Comparison: (Albany City Schools)			Comparison: (Albany City Schools)		
	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District
	4			4			5	51.3	46.0
	8			8					--
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3).				Effect Size			Effect Size		
				4			N	Actual	Predicted
				8			78	51.3	50.6
									0.04
									NO
VALUE ADDED MEASURE									
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam.	Assessment:			Assessment:			Assessment:		
	Grades	Cohorts Making Target	of	Grades	Cohorts Making Target	of	Grades	Cohorts Making Target	of
	NA			NA			NA		
	N	Base	Target	N	Base	Target	N	Base	Target
			Result			Result			Result
									--

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Mathematics

KIPP Tech Valley Charter School



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

	2003-04 Grades Served: None			MET	2004-05 Grades Served: None			MET	2005-06 Grades Served: 5			MET
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 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.	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)				
	Grades			Grades			Grades					
	4	(0)	(0)	4	(0)	(0)	3	(0)	(0)			
	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	4	(0)	(0)			
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	PI	AMO		PI	AMO		PI	AMO				
	Grades			Grades			Grades					
	4			4			5	144	86			
	8			8					YES			
COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local district.	Comparison: (Albany City Schools)			Comparison: (Albany City Schools)			Comparison: (Albany City Schools)					
	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District			
	4			4			5	53.3	46.3	--		
	8			8								
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3).												
	Effect: Grades Actual Predicted Size			Effect: Grades Actual Predicted Size			Effect: Grades Actual Predicted Size					
	4			4			75	53.3	52.9	0.02		
	8			8						NO		
VALUE ADDED MEASURE 5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam.	Assessment: Grades Cohorts Making Target: NA of N Base Target Result			Assessment: Grades Cohorts Making Target: NA of N Base Target Result			Assessment: Grades Cohorts Making Target: NA of N Base Target Result			--		

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Assessment and Use of Assessment Data

KIPP Tech Valley has implemented a system to gather assessment data to monitor student progress toward the acquisition of skills and content knowledge. The school administers the assessments required by the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP), Terra Nova, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and comprehensive assessments created by School Performance, Inc. on a regular basis. In addition, the school administers weekly, teacher-developed assessments in each of the core-subject areas.

KIPP Tech Valley routinely collects and analyzes student level data from these assessments and uses each of them for separate purposes. For example, students' grades are based on teacher-developed assessments. These, in turn, are developed to be aligned with the comprehensive assessments created by School Performance, Inc. The school uses the comprehensive assessments to validate the results of the teacher-developed assessments, to predict student performance on state assessments administered as part of the NYSTP, to evaluate student mastery of skills and content knowledge, and to identify opportunities for re-teaching or remediation. In addition, the results of the Terra Nova are utilized to demonstrate year-to-year progress. As a result, KIPP Tech Valley has a comprehensive and purposeful assessment program in place.

With regard to using assessment results to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction, the school director has identified a clear philosophy and approach for doing so. For example, on the day of the visit, the school director stated that after each administration of the comprehensive exams, teachers are expected to classify the skills assessed into three groups: those that approximately 70% of students have mastered, those that approximately 30% of students have mastered, and those that only half of the class has mastered. He described a responsive process whereby, based on the percentage of students that have mastered a skill, teachers are expected to address student deficiencies in skill or content through targeted, small group instruction, re-teaching, or a spiraling of previously taught objectives for review and further practice, respectively. School inspectors found that teachers were able to describe the role of comprehensive assessments in informing instructional decisions with the same precision as the school director, suggesting that this system has been internalized by school staff.

At-risk Students

KIPP Tech Valley addresses the needs of struggling learners through a variety of structured programs and strategies. In addition to the use of assessment data to inform instruction discussed above, the school has grouped its 6th grade students homogeneously based upon their 5th grade Terra Nova scores in mathematics. KIPP Tech Valley also offers a daily 45 minute period of instruction called "No Shortcuts," when students have an opportunity to receive remedial instruction in mathematics or reading, while students who have demonstrated mastery of the school's Superstandards are offered enrichment opportunities. Furthermore, the school devotes the final hour of the day to additional tutoring opportunities.

The school also offers its special education students additional support through both push-in and pull-out services provided by a staff member who is a certified special education teacher. The staff member, who devotes half of his time at the school to serving special education students exclusively, works informally with teachers to coordinate instruction and services for their shared students.

However, at the time of the visit, teachers expressed a desire to receive more information and formalized support in working with their students with special education needs.

Curriculum and Instruction

KIPP Tech Valley has access to a curriculum framework that is based upon state performance standards referred to as the “Superstandards.” The Superstandards, derived by School Performance, Inc. from its analysis of both assessments required by the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP) and the school’s comprehensive assessments, consist of a set of skills that are grouped in six-week intervals and used by teachers as the primary guiding document when planning units and daily lessons. According to both the school director and teachers, this document represents the minimum articulation of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level; some teachers supplement instruction with additional student learning objectives. However, school staff (including the school director) indicated that this occurs on a teacher by teacher basis, and that modifications or additions to the instructional program are not well-documented.

In its second year of instruction, the school struggles with identifying school-wide instructional approaches to and resources for the teaching of core subject areas, including English language arts and mathematics. For example, in mathematics, the school draws from materials developed by the KIPP network, as well as Boston Preparatory Charter School and School Performance, Inc. How these materials are utilized in lesson delivery, however, is left up to individual teachers. The same is true in English language arts, where, at the time of the visit, the school utilized the Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop approach to the teaching of reading and writing, but was considering other more structured programs particularly for writing, where the school’s curriculum remains largely undeveloped. At the time of the second year inspection, teachers indicated that they are charged with choosing resources, developing curricular materials, and designing specific learning activities for their students while simultaneously implementing the program, leaving them feeling overwhelmed by the scope of their responsibilities. This is a source of great concern to the teachers at KIPP Tech Valley. One teacher stated, “There is no curriculum, just the standards... That is my main gripe about this system.”

Furthermore, the school has not yet identified or implemented a system for identifying and addressing strengths and deficiencies in the school’s curriculum, as implemented. Over time the combination of these practices is likely to result in less than desirable results in the continuity and coordination of the instructional program from grade-to-grade and year-to-year.

The work of school staff is further complicated by the level of teacher turnover experienced by the school during the 2006-2007 academic year, during which three of the school’s seven core academic teachers were replaced with teachers new to the school. As a result, the school’s director has had to provide a significant level of instructional support to teachers new to the school, teaching them to implement the school’s classroom management system, supporting them in lesson planning, and even modeling instruction on a full-time basis for up to two weeks at a time. Some teachers expressed regret that, due to the need to support teachers new to the school, the school director has not been able to focus on improving the overall quality of instruction among all teachers at the school. The school leadership and board of trustees have acknowledged the additional challenges and burdens that this situation has created for the school director and teachers, and have responded by hiring a full-time teacher recruitment specialist to carefully screen and identify highly capable and committed teaching candidates.

Taking into consideration the relative newness of many members of the teaching staff, the inspection team was not surprised to find variation in the quality of instruction from classroom to classroom throughout the school. While some teachers struggled to faithfully and fairly implement the school's classroom management system, others were able to focus more attention on the activities of teaching and learning. Overall, inspectors noted 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. In addition, evidence collected on the day of the school inspection suggests that teachers at KIPP Tech Valley had not carefully aligned student learning objectives with learning activities and opportunities for assessment, resulting in students completing seemingly unrelated tasks and enduring abrupt transitions within lessons.

Instructional Leadership and Professional Development

Consistent with its charter, KIPP Tech Valley employs a co-leadership model for the school. This model includes the school's director and chief operations officer, and allows the school director to place the majority of his time and attention on teaching and learning, while the chief operations officer is responsible for providing accurate financial information and addressing operational issues, and other logistical matters. As one board member stated, "Together they are greater than the sum of their parts," although the school director is solely accountable to the school's board of trustees for overall school performance.

The school director approaches his responsibilities with a great deal of involvement in day-to-day instructional activities. Teachers stated, and school inspectors noted, that the school director spends a significant portion of the school day in and around classrooms throughout the school. He stated, "I float through every class every day...Right now I can give [teachers] feedback in real time." In addition, he collects and reviews teachers' weekly (and in some cases, daily) lesson plans, materials and resources, providing feedback upon request by teachers. Furthermore, the school director's desk is located in the hallway, creating a high degree of transparency with regard to all aspects of teaching and learning at the school.

As noted above, the school has experienced a great deal of teacher turnover in its second year. Since the inception of the 2006-07 school year, three teachers have left the school, requiring KIPP Tech Valley to recruit and hire replacements. For teachers who have joined the faculty subsequent to the start of the school year, the school director provides significant transition support, including planning units and lessons for the new teachers, modeling instruction and classroom management techniques for up to two weeks at a time, and remaining a constant presence within and around the classroom.

While teachers new to the school indicated that this intensive support has been helpful, inspectors questioned the efficacy of focusing on new teachers at the expense of providing differentiated professional development for all teachers at the school. For example, during classroom observations inspectors noted that teachers new to the school did not yet demonstrate mastery of the school's approach to classroom management. One such teacher noted, "Learning the procedures and ritual was difficult...I'm still working on that." Another teacher indicated, that, after several weeks at the school, most of the lesson planning is still completed by the school director, and that the teacher does not receive ongoing coaching and feedback despite the school director's very regular presence in the classroom or classroom doorway. Other teachers also noted to school inspectors that other facets of the school director's responsibilities have suffered because of his heavy concentration on instructing new teachers, including their own growth and development as teachers.

Governance

KIPP Tech Valley benefits from a strong school board that analyzes a variety of data and information in fulfilling their school oversight responsibilities, and whose members clearly understand the difference between school governance and management. On the day of the visit, the two board members present spoke knowledgeably about all aspects of the school, indicating that the school board provides a high level of oversight over the school's academic program, organizational viability, and fiscal soundness. Notably, they have completed an evaluation of the school's leader, and at the time of the visit, were contemplating an assessment of their own performance as a school board, as well as identifying areas for further board development.

The school board has demonstrated its responsiveness to the challenges facing KIPP Tech Valley. For example, members of the board expressed an acute awareness of the potential for turnover among the school staff and leadership, and are considering several retention incentives. In addition, the board has devoted significant resources to the hiring of a teacher recruitment specialist in an effort to attract and hire the most capable and committed teachers to the school.

APPENDIX: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p align="center">Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p align="center">1A.1 English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.4 Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p align="center">1B The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 1C Curriculum</p>	<p align="center">1C The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
Benchmark 1D Pedagogy	1D.1 The school has strong instructional leadership.
	1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.
	1D.3 The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education. .
Benchmark 1E Student Order & Discipline	1E The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.
Benchmark 1F Professional Development	1F The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1 The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals.

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second-Year Visit at KIPP Tech Valley Charter School on March 1, 2007. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Kim Wechtenhiser (Team Leader) was promoted to Associate Vice President at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York in August of 2006. Ms. Wechtenhiser maintains primary responsibility for the Institute's charter renewal process; overseeing a comprehensive evaluation of each SUNY authorized charter school as it comes up for renewal. Ms. Wechtenhiser joined the Institute in September 2005 as a Senior Analyst. Prior to her work with the Institute, Ms. Wechtenhiser served as the Coordinator of New Schools Development in the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts Department of Education, where she led the review of new charter school applications, provided technical assistance to newly chartered schools, participated in the ongoing review of their academic and organizational performance, and oversaw the charter amendment process. Ms. Wechtenhiser is the former Lead Teacher of Spanish at City on a Hill Charter Public School in Boston, where she also served as faculty representative to the school's Board of Trustees. She taught Spanish at Westfield Public High School and English at the Universidad de Córdoba in Spain. Ms. Wechtenhiser holds a B.A. in Spanish and Secondary Education and a M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature, both from Simmons College. She earned an Ed.M. in School Leadership from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Joanne Falinski, Ph.D., is the Vice President for Charter School Evaluation at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Dr. Falinski most recently served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Pace University, Pleasantville, NY. Her responsibilities included teaching both undergraduate and graduate education courses, supervising literacy practicum students in the field and conducting relevant research. She also presented at numerous regional and national conferences on topics of literacy, professional development and collaboration between special education and regular education. Dr. Falinski was actively involved in the University community, serving as a member of the Institutional Review Board and Writing Center Advisory Board. Prior to joining Pace, Dr. Falinski served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education for Manhattanville College and Director of a NYS site of the National Writing Project. Dr. Falinski's vast experience in the K-12 community includes serving as an Elementary Classroom Teacher and Elementary Principal.

Jason L. Sarsfield is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Mr. Sarsfield fulfills a leadership role in informal and annual visits to SUNY authorized charter schools as well as participates in the charter renewal review process, provides technical assistance to schools as needed, and contributes to the Institute's research agenda. Prior to joining the Institute in January, 2007 Mr. Sarsfield was a Contract Analyst at The Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University – Office of Academic Accountability where he was responsible for evaluating the academic performance of authorized schools, reviewing school curricula and educational program, and measuring progress toward educational goals. While at Central Michigan University, Mr. Sarsfield worked closely with the Michigan Department of Education on annual legislative reports, grant reviews, and policy recommendations. Previously, Mr. Sarsfield taught social studies in grades 7-12 in Michigan and Alaska while also completing curriculum development responsibilities and serving as an Advanced Placement Exam Reader for The College Board. Mr. Sarsfield holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan

University and is completing the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.

Susan Seymour is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

Simeon Stolzberg is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Part of the Institute's oversight and evaluation team, Mr. Stolzberg participates in informal, annual and renewal school visits. Mr. Stolzberg also assists in the development and execution of the Institute's research agenda, performing statistical analyses of student academic data, and providing technical guidance to schools as needed. Prior to joining the Institute, Mr. Stolzberg managed his own consulting practice, advising charter schools across the country in their application and planning phases. He also served as Middle School Director for the Beginning with Children Charter School in Brooklyn, New York. In 2002, as a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Mr. Stolzberg wrote the prospectus and application for the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BArT) in Massachusetts; the school was one of only five schools approved by the state that year. Mr. Stolzberg served as the school's founding principal. Mr. Stolzberg received his Master's Degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, with independent studies in education and political economy, from Williams College.