



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# **External Evaluation Report of Harlem Link Charter School**

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**2007 – 2008**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	CONDUCT OF THE VISIT .....	3
III.	SCHOOL DESCRIPTION .....	5
IV.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	8
V.	SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT .....	11
	Part I: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success .....	11
	A. “School Performance Review” .....	11
	B. “School Educational Program Review” .....	12
	Part 2. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability .....	22
	A. Are the school’s mission and vision clear to all stakeholders? .....	22
	B. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school? .....	22
	C. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed? .....	23
VI.	OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL .....	24
	APPENDIX A: Framework for Report Discussion .....	26

# Harlem Link 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”).<sup>1</sup>

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

This report is organized in the following sections:

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 on the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

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 Harlem Link Charter School was conducted on April 16 and 17, 2008 by an independent team of experienced educators from RMC Research, New York, New York. The team was comprised of the following individuals:

- **Sandra Kase, Ed.D.** (Team Leader) is an educational consultant currently providing services for RMC Research. Dr. Kase began her career in the New York City public schools as a teacher, staff developer and district administrator. She served as principal of the Claremont Community School for 14 years before moving to the New York City Board of Education as an Assistant to the Chancellor for School Improvement and Supervising Superintendent of the Chancellor's District. During that time, Dr. Kase focused on improving the lowest performing schools in the city and creating high quality new schools designed to provide rigorous educational opportunities for traditionally underperforming students. During 2003, Dr. Kase worked with the incoming Chancellor and his staff to support the transition to the newly created Department of Education. In March, 2004 she began to work in Peekskill, New York to support the efforts of the superintendent to raise the academic achievement of the students in that community. Dr. Kase has developed a wide array of programs, including: gifted and talented programs designed to provide opportunities for students who would normally be underserved; courses at museums such as the American Museum of Natural History; university based programs for K-12 students; and extended day and year programs which blended cultural experiences with demanding learning standards to raise the academic levels of all participants. Dr. Kase is currently a member of the Institutional Review Board of Touro College. She holds a Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy from Fordham University.
- **Adam Tanney** is a Research Associate at RMC Research. Mr. Tanney taught 11<sup>th</sup> and 12 grade history in New Hampshire. He has conducted research for the U.S. Education Department (USED). He currently provides technical assistance to districts and state departments of education on comprehensive local assessment systems, advises state departments of education on statewide systems of support for school improvement, and has conducted numerous school reviews in a variety of accountability contexts. Mr. Tanney holds a Master's Degree in School Leadership.
- **Ellen Rosenbaum** is a Research Associate for RMC Research. With over 33 years of experience in the New York City schools, Ms. Rosenbaum has served as an elementary school teacher, teacher trainer and district administrator. As the Director of School Improvement for Community School District 8 in New York City, she worked with school leaders to use data to inform instruction and develop school reform initiatives. Ms. Rosenbaum holds a Master's Degree in Education and Professional Diploma in School District Administration.
- **Janice M. Imundi** is a Research Associate for RMC Research. She also serves as a member of the Adolescent Literacy Team for the New York Comprehensive Center (NYCC), a USED contracted project of RMC Research. Currently, she is working with the New York State Education Department to review the English Language Arts Standards. Her career of over 30 years in education was spent working with students in

the New York City Public schools. Ms. Imundi was a teacher in junior high school, an assistant principal in both an elementary school and middle school and a principal in a middle school. During her career, Ms. Imundi also served as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Education at Mercy College and at Long Island University. Prior to joining RMC, she worked with aspiring principals and first year principals as a principal mentor with *New Visions for Public Schools* and the *New York City Leadership Academy*. Ms. Imundi holds a Master's Degree in Secondary Education and a Professional Diploma in Administration and Supervision.

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

### III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application to establish the Harlem Link Charter School (“Harlem Link”) on June 22, 2004, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on September 9, 2004. After taking one planning year (2004-05), the school opened in September 2005 at 134 West 122<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York City with an enrollment of 101 students in Kindergarten and first grade. The school added one grade in each of the following two years, enrolling 159 students in Kindergarten through third grade during the 2007-08 school year. Just prior to the start of the 2007-08 school year, the school secured seven additional classrooms within the P.S. 129 building at 425 W 130<sup>th</sup> Street which it refers to as “the Annex.” In 2007-08, grades one through three were housed in the main location on 122<sup>nd</sup> Street, and Kindergarten was housed in the Annex (located 11 blocks from the main building). In the 2008-09 school year, the school plans to house Kindergarten and first grade at the annex, and third and fourth grade in the main building.

The initial mission statement for Harlem Link was as follows:

*Harlem Link Charter School, a K-4 public school, links academics, values and community to graduate articulate scholars who will meet or exceed New York State Performance Standards and active citizens who learn and serve in their communities. Families, staff and community join together to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that empowers students to take an active role in their learning and demonstrate good character.*

Harlem Link Charter School applied for and was granted a one-year Short-Term Planning Year Renewal by the State University Trustees in May of 2008 renewing its charter through July 31, 2010 with authority to provide instruction to students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2009-10 with a projected enrollment of 324 students. The addition of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade was not initially envisioned in the school’s charter but is consistent with the configuration of district schools in the same Community School District as Harlem Link.

The school slightly revised its mission statement to reflect the addition of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade:

*Harlem Link Charter School, a K-5 public school, links academics, values and community to graduate articulate scholars who will meet or exceed New York State Performance Standards and active citizens who learn and serve in their communities. Families, staff and community join together to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that empowers students to take an active role in their learning and demonstrate good character.*

The key design elements for Harlem Link include:

- rigorous, high expectations and a belief in students;
- data-driven instruction;
- extended school year, and eventually an extended day program;
- structured academic programs, including “fieldwork;”
- high levels of professional development;

- a co-teaching model;
- strong connections to community-based organizations for the arts;
- a “focus” period, specifically designed for individualized or small-group instruction based on children’s academic needs;
- family and community involvement strategies; and
- supportive school culture.

**School Year (2007-08)**

190 instructional days annually<sup>2</sup>

**School Day (2007-08)**

8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.<sup>3</sup>

**Enrollment**

	<b>Original Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Revised Chartered Enrollment</b>	<b>Actual Enrollment<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Original Chartered Grades</b>	<b>Revised Grades Served</b>	<b>Actual Grades Served</b>	<b>Complying</b>
<b>2004-05</b>	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
<b>2005-06</b>	108		<b>101</b>	K-1	K-1	<b>K-1</b>	YES
<b>2006-07</b>	162		<b>162</b>	K-2	K-2	<b>K-2</b>	YES
<b>2007-08</b>	216		<b>195</b>	K-3	K-3	<b>K-3</b>	YES
<b>2008-09</b>	270			K-4			
<b>2009-10</b>	327			K-5			

<sup>2</sup> Initially, the school year was a minimum of 200 days per year. The calendar was revised in 2008 as part of the Short-Term Planning Year Renewal process to generally align with that of the New York City School District.

<sup>3</sup> According to the school’s charter, 8:00 – 8:30 a.m. is used as an optional breakfast time.

<sup>4</sup> 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.



Race/Ethnicity	2005-2006	
	% of Enroll. Harlem Link	% of Enroll. CSD #3
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0 %	0.0 %
Black or African American	81.0 %	35.0 %
Hispanic	19.0 %	37.0 %
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.0 %	6.0 %
White	0.0 %	22.0 %

Source: 2005-06: NYSED School Report Card; 2006-07: NYSED database

Special Populations	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Harlem Link	% of Enroll. CSD #3	% of Enroll. Harlem Link	% of Enroll. CSD #3
Students with Disabilities	NA	NA	8.6 %	13.0 %
Limited English Proficient	0.0 %	11.0 %	0.6 %	9.8 %

Source: Students with Disabilities: NYSED database; Limited English Proficient: 2005-06: NYSED School Report Card; 2006-07: NYSED database

Free/Reduced Lunch	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Harlem Link	% of Enroll. CSD #3	% of Enroll. Harlem Link	% of Enroll. CSD #3
Eligible for Free Lunch	61.0 %	52.0 %	69.1 %	47.4 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	17.0 %	7.0 %	14.2 %	8.2 %

Source: 2005-06: NYSED School Report Card; 2006-07: NYSED 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 – 2nd Year	2005-06	1 <sup>st</sup>	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
Original Charter – 3rd Year	2006-07	2 <sup>nd</sup>	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter – 4th Year	2007-08	3 <sup>rd</sup>	YES	External Evaluation Report	Short-Term Planning Year Renewal Granted May of 2008; approves addition of grade 5. Charter renewed through July 2010

#### IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on evidence gathered during the Third-Year Inspection Visit, inspectors concluded that issues cited in the report of the Institute's Second-Year Visit had not yet been fully addressed, undermining Harlem Link's ability to reach and sustain its goals for high student academic achievement.

For example, during the 2006-07 school year Harlem Link took actions to improve student order and discipline. The school hired a dean of students and recruited associate deans from the community to implement a school-wide code of conduct and a system for classroom management. However, during the 2007-08 inspection visit, team members found that these initiatives had not achieved their expected outcomes. The code of conduct was not uniformly enforced and management systems were not being implemented consistently. As a result, teaching and learning were not able to occur in many classes.

While in its third year of operation, the 2007-08 school year was the first year in which Harlem Link offered third grade and was therefore required to administer the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP) assessments. Results from these assessments had not been returned to the school at the time of the inspection visit.

A lower school director was hired for the 2007-08 school year to maintain responsibility for the supervision of two Kindergarten classes, to serve as the leadership presence and serve as the liaison to the district school sharing space at the satellite site. The lower school director regularly observed the Kindergarten teachers, gave them meaningful feedback and provided them with classroom based mentoring and professional development. In first through third grade at the main site, responsibilities for supervision had been dispersed among the school's co-directors and the student support coordinator, each implementing their supervisory practices in a different manner. The co-director for operations, whose focus and experience are not primarily instructional, was responsible for supervising the operational staff at both sites and the third grade teachers who were inexperienced and who were implementing the state testing program for the first time this year. The two co-directors intentionally tried to involve staff in instructional decisions. However, staff reported that while they felt free to give their input, it was often not reflected in the instructional decisions ultimately made. School inspectors also concluded that many changes in staff, combined with less than effective communication among the co-directors, staff and parents, created a school culture that reflected frustration and mistrust toward the administration rather than that of a cohesive school community.

Additional curriculum documents had been developed during the previous summer for the 2007-08 school year in an attempt to unify the academic program throughout the school. However, school inspectors found that a cohesive, seamless school-wide curriculum aligned throughout all grades had not been achieved. Teachers needed more consistent support to develop and implement unit, five-day and daily lesson plans that would support their instruction. While teachers developed these plans in grade meetings with some assistance from support staff, supervision to ensure that teachers were implementing the curriculum as planned was insufficient. Further, the plans did not provide teachers with the specificity needed to support rigorous daily instruction.

The quality of instruction and the degree of student engagement observed varied in each classroom. Harlem Link continued to refine its co-teaching approaches which, although more clearly defined

than in the 2006-07 school year, continued to be implemented in various ways throughout the school, including the parallel teacher and lead/support co-teaching models.

During the 2007-08 school year, Harlem Link added resources to support interventions and programs for at-risk students. A student support coordinator was added to the Harlem Link staff to provide additional help for at risk students and their teachers. Additionally, the Title I reading teacher and the academic intervention services (AIS) specialist focused support on students in first and second grades. A three tiered system for intervention to provide support to at-risk students and ensure that referrals to special education, when necessary, had been developed. Students identified as trackers were provided with differentiated instruction in class and with additional supports. Teachers were aware of the intervention system and of services available at Harlem Link.

There were three students who were English Language Learners in Harlem Link. They were integrated into regular classrooms. Mandated procedures were used to identify these students and monitor their progress, including the Home Language Survey, the Language Assessment Battery (LAB) and the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT).

The Title I reading teacher and the AIS teacher provided direct services to struggling students. The consultant from the Cooke Center for Learning and Development observed students and provided some suggestions to teachers for meeting their instructional and behavioral needs. Graduate students from Bank Street College also served as tutors for struggling students. Harlem Link's program to support students who were struggling academically held promise for helping them to achieve school goals.

Harlem Link had developed a system to gather assessment and evaluation data but had not fully developed the ability to use the data to improve teaching and learning. Harlem Link added an assessment coordinator to its staff in 2007-08. The role of the assessment coordinator was to help third grade teachers prepare the students for the New York State assessments, to score the assessments that were administered, to coordinate the administration of the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Terra Nova and to analyze the assessment data. The assessment coordinator also prepared data reports for teachers and supported them in understanding and utilizing the assessment results to inform their instruction. Teachers acknowledged that the assessment coordinator was a helpful resource but indicated that they needed even more support and training. A mathematics consultant worked with teachers to help them understand and utilize information gained from mathematics assessments. Data from informal assessments, such as student conferencing and portfolios, were not administered uniformly or used consistently throughout the school. Harlem Link administrators had not evaluated the effectiveness of the school-wide assessment program.

The Harlem Link professional development program did not adequately assist teachers in identifying and meeting the needs of students in all areas. It was fragmented to the extent that training and support were chiefly delivered by outside literacy, mathematics and special education consultants, who came to the school approximately one day per week. Teachers valued their assistance but needed more regular support. Some professional development was also provided during the summer and during the school year by the dean of students, the assessment coordinator and the student support coordinator. Teachers reported their need for more frequent, consistent and coordinated support.

The board of trustees had developed limited systems for carrying out its school oversight responsibilities. By the third year of operation the board of trustees had not yet developed a mechanism to evaluate the co-directors, nor had it established a formal mechanism for obtaining feedback and input from parents. Members of the Harlem Link board of trustees interviewed by the inspection team appeared to be less than confident in the effectiveness of the Harlem Link instructional program and in the administrative structure of the school but, despite these concerns, had not implemented a system for holding the co-directors accountable.

## **V. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT**

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

#### **A. School Performance Review through 2006-07**

*(Please note that this performance review reflects data that were available at the time of the inspection visit, and that were considered by the visit team and used by the school to make decisions.)*

**Performance Summary:** In 2006-07 Harlem Link served students in Kindergarten through second grade, and thus had not yet administered any state assessments. As a result, measures in the school's Accountability Plan did not apply. However, the school did report results from the administration of Terra Nova and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) assessments for the fall and spring of 2006-07. Based on Terra Nova results, students in first and second grades are not performing at the national norm in English language arts or mathematics, and the performance of second grade students declined in both subjects. These 2006-07 results suggest that Harlem Link is not on track to meeting its key Accountability Plan goals.

**English language arts:** On the Terra Nova exam in June, Kindergarten students performed below the national norm in Reading (46 NCE) and above the national norm in Language (57 NCE). The first grade students had an average NCE of 43 on the Reading subtest in the spring, which was about the same level of performance as in the fall. On the Language subtest, the spring performance was 48 NCE, up 5 points from the fall. The second grade class declined from 50 NCE in the fall to 44 on the Reading test, and declined from 55 to 47 on the Language test. Harlem Link also reported improvement in reading skills based on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), with students enrolled longer in the school showing larger gains. Note that fall to spring comparisons often show greater change than spring to spring comparisons, which is the method used for the value-added measure in the school's Accountability Plan.

**Mathematics:** On the Terra Nova, the first grade finished the year below the national norm with an average NCE of 44, up 7 NCE from the fall. The second grade declined from 43 NCE in the fall to 38 NCE in the spring, well below the national norm. In terms of value-added, in the first grade returning students outperformed new students by 9 NCE. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, there was little difference between the two sets of students.

**Science:** Not applicable this year.

**Social Studies:** Not applicable this year.

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

## **B. “School Educational Program Review”**

### Student Order and Discipline

The report of the Institute’s Second-Year Inspection Visit indicated that student order and discipline had improved from the prior year, noting an effort to develop and install “school-wide systems to set expectations for and manage classroom behavior.” During the Third-Year Inspection Visit however, the inspection team found that, indeed, a system had been installed but had not yet served to create a school-wide culture for learning. All classrooms were not orderly or appropriate learning environments conducive to high levels of student engagement and quality instruction. There was evidence of a Harlem Link Charter School Code of Conduct with a *Behavior Violations and Appropriate Disciplinary Procedures* section and a *Hierarchy of Intervention* section included in the 2007-08 Family Handbook. There was also a family accountability contract that was purported to be completed for each student. Administrators reported that there was a new behavior management document that provided guidelines for handling behaviors, developed in February 2008. School inspectors did not see the document and it had not been seen by all staff members interviewed.

The school-wide classroom management system consisted of green, yellow and red behavior cards (turned from one side to another when students violated the rules). There had been some training on the use of this system during the previous summer. All staff interviewed indicated that the school’s classroom management system was not uniformly applied insofar as the cards were either used or not used by teachers based on their own discretion and, if they were used, were implemented inconsistently from class to class across all grades, including the enforcement of consequences for inappropriate behavior. Some teachers indicated that the system should be discarded and characterized it as negative and punitive. Teachers reported that the dean of students did try to provide assistance to them, but was not fully effective because she appeared unable to make decisions about the specific consequences for students based on their behavior. Although the role of the dean of students included supporting teachers’ implementation of the school-wide classroom management system, she was not involved in the training of new teachers and could not verify that those teachers received explicit training in either the administration of the school code of conduct or the management system. School inspectors found that the role of the dean of students had not yet been fully developed or integrated into a school-wide approach to student discipline that was implemented consistently by administrators and teachers.

School inspectors found that the current system for student discipline was not working. It was observed that, in some classes, teachers were shouting so loudly in an attempt to bring order to their classes that teaching and learning could not occur. There was strong evidence to conclude that a school-wide culture in which learning is valued had not been established. One teacher reported, “It’s not the kids, it’s us. There are too many kids having problems.” Students interviewed also indicated that distractions in class negatively affected their ability to learn. School inspectors observed that many teachers allowed students to continue to engage in inappropriate behaviors and remain disengaged from instruction in the classroom without consequences. The lack of adequate teacher training and the absence of uniform application of procedures created a disorganized climate both inside and outside of classrooms.

### Instructional Leadership

In the report of the Institute’s Second-Year Inspection Visit, instructional leadership was cited as an area of weakness for Harlem Link Charter School. At the time, clear priorities and expectations had

not been set for curriculum, instruction and assessment. Additionally, the co-director for instruction had not been able to establish a system for clinical supervision and could not manage to visit all classrooms to supervise and support teachers. The 2007-08 inspection team found that some of these issues had been addressed. Responsibilities for observing teachers had been divided among the leadership team which consisted of the co-directors, the lower school director and the student support coordinator. The lower school director was responsible for the Kindergarten classes; the co-director for instruction was responsible for first and second grades; the co-director for operations supervised instruction for the third grade; and the student support coordinator supervised the special education teachers. This division of responsibilities created the potential for closer support and supervision of teachers than had existed before.

However, although there were members of the leadership team assigned to supervise each grade, there was no consistently effective system established for them to observe teaching practices. The instructional supervisor for the third grade was the co-director for operations who indicated that his area of strength was not instruction. He acknowledged that he did not monitor teachers' lesson plans as regularly as he wanted to and that the choice for him to supervise the third grade might not have been the best decision.

The system developed to evaluate teachers' practices was fragmented and inconsistent. Some teachers reported that they were observed formally twice during the year and others reported that they were observed three times. All teachers indicated that the feedback was provided through e-mail and some teachers felt that the feedback was neither specific nor helpful. Additionally, school leaders had not developed guidance documents to enable teachers to understand how instruction should be implemented. Many teachers reported that they would have preferred that school leaders meet with them personally to have conversations during which the areas that needed to be addressed were identified, specific suggestions for improvement were offered and a date for checking back to see if the suggestions had been followed was agreed upon. It should be noted, however, that Kindergarten teachers described a different observation process which did include a pre-observation conference and a post observation meeting in which the lower school director shared her findings and engaged in conversation which included teachers' self-evaluations and reflections. School inspectors found little evidence to indicate that staffing decisions were driven by Harlem Link's evaluation system. Further, the evaluation system in place did not include enough specific feedback to teachers to help them continually improve their teaching practices.

Reviewers encountered little evidence that the school leadership was holding teachers accountable for following or modifying the curriculum. For example, teachers reported that they were given a social studies plan which they reported was hard to implement. As a result they changed it without the knowledge of school leadership. In other cases, teachers were not able to adhere to the pacing calendars for subjects in their grades and they fell behind. As a result, the lessons they were implementing were different from what was represented on the scope and sequence document or in the five day plans. Teachers reported that they regularly made changes to the curriculum presented to them by school leaders.

Teachers generally reported that the co-director for instruction made all of the instructional decisions and that she was "in charge." Despite the authority of one voice, the inspection team concluded that priorities, and decisions made to support those priorities, were not always clearly understood. While teachers indicated that they were able to provide suggestions for change to the co-director for instruction, they were unclear, or at other times even unaware of final decisions. Staff indicated that

the co-director for instruction, with the co-director for operations, was responsible for making decisions about all aspects of the school including setting the year's priorities (i.e. increased quality of curriculum and instruction), developing scope and sequence documents and deciding on the kinds of professional development to provide for the staff. Although the co-directors sought and encouraged input from staff in an attempt to develop a culture of collaboration, teachers, support staff and parents reported that they did not feel that they were part of the decision making process and that there needed to be more consistency and follow through with decisions that were made.

Although the co-directors sought to open the lines of communication with staff and parents, school inspectors found that these efforts had not been very successful. Administrators reported that they were trying to be more explicit with staff. However, school inspectors found evidence that there had been policy and organizational changes that had not been communicated prior to implementation which contributed to an atmosphere of misunderstanding. For example, the termination of a returning teacher in September 2007 resulted in parent concerns about the dismissal of teachers without personal communication and teacher concerns about unexpected changes in staffing. Despite individual meetings by the co-directors with affected teachers and a family forum for the affected class, several staff members continued to express disagreement, consternation and even fear due to the termination. In addition, staff members were troubled about abrupt changes in lunchroom and behavior procedures that had not been discussed with them, and teachers reported concerns about inconsistencies in enforcing the behavioral policy. School inspectors found evidence that these concerns had a negative effect on the morale of teachers, staff and parents.

There had been staffing changes during the course of the 2007-08 school year. At the time of the visit, ten of the twenty-two teachers on staff were new (three teachers either left of their own accord or were dismissed after the school year began). As a result, there was no co-teacher in one third grade class until December 2007. One teacher was moved from her assignment in September to fill a vacancy in first grade, and another teacher had to be hired to fill a vacancy in Kindergarten. These personnel shifts caused disruption to the school organization. Additionally, the impacted third grade classroom from December on had two novice teachers working together, and they had the responsibility to prepare their students to take the state assessments for the first time. The affected first grade class, which was a collaborative team teaching (CTT) class, had no special education teacher as a result of the changes, although each CTT class should have one special education teacher and one regular education teacher. School leaders indicated that they were aware of the need to develop a stable staff and made special efforts to integrate new teachers into the existing school culture through the creation of social opportunities that would allow the teachers to get to know one another.

The Harlem Link leadership team included a coaching model as part of their professional development program. In-class coaching was reported to be provided for teachers on a limited basis by the consultant staff developers and by members of the support staff, including the student support coordinator and the assessment coordinator. Teachers reported the need for more ongoing coaching and support in classrooms.

### Curriculum

Harlem Link had been in the process of developing its own curriculum over time based on school-specific learning standards that had been created in English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science. The Harlem Link learning standards consisted of a series of separate documents,



including overviews of topics developed by grade, scope and sequence documents, pacing calendars, and units of study. The co-directors indicated that the Harlem Link standards were more rigorous than the New York State standards. School inspectors were presented with a separate curriculum crosswalk document that purported to link the Harlem Link curriculum to New York State standards. Because of its complexity, school inspectors could not determine if there were any gaps or redundancies in the correlation between the curriculum and the standards or between the Harlem Link and New York State standards. It was also unclear whether the curriculum was aligned across grades. Since teachers regularly modified the curriculum, inspectors concluded that there could be no assurance that the curriculum being implemented in all classes and grades was standards based.

During the summer of 2007, the co-director for instruction developed scope and sequence documents based on the school's own learning standards for English language arts, mathematics, and science, as well as units of study sequence documents for social studies which were presented to teachers at the summer institute. Teachers reported that these documents were helpful.

Units of study were developed monthly by grade teams of teachers from first through third grade in English language arts, writing, social studies and science with the help of the staff developers. They were not detailed and were reported to be recreated yearly. Teachers continued to express frustration at having to develop the units and at not having enough support. They indicated that they were "spread too thin."

The unit plans were not aligned throughout the grades. The English language arts staff developer reported that she had worked with a literacy team consisting of a representative from each grade to develop the units and that they had discussed the next steps for mapping the curriculum and vertically aligning the curriculum and the units of study. The mathematics staff developer reported that she worked with teachers on a mathematics learning committee which planned lessons together and developed curriculum based on the current mathematics programs being used (Investigations and Context for Learning). There were also pacing calendars for teaching reading, writing, word study and mathematics. Teachers felt that there were too many separate documents and that it would be helpful if "everything was together." The inspection team also had difficulty in understanding the coordination of content in all of the documents. While the additional documents served to move the school closer to having a curriculum that is both aligned to state standards and provides a roadmap for instruction from Kindergarten through third grade, visit inspectors concluded that those objectives had not yet been achieved.

Additionally, teachers were charged with completing five-day plans based on the unit plans and the scope and sequence documents. Inspectors found the five-day plans uneven with varying levels of detail. Additionally, the plans were developed by grade teams with support from the consultant staff developers and Harlem Link support staff. These plans were created without consulting teachers from other grades. As a result, they were not seamless from grade to grade. The plans were not checked regularly by grade supervisors in the upper school and were modified by teachers as needed resulting in a lack of consistency and alignment with the required scope and sequence documents. School inspectors observed discrepancies in the curriculum content between the five day plans and the scope and sequence in some classrooms. The topics scheduled to be taught based on the scope and sequence were not what was included in the plan or what were actually being implemented. Teachers also reported that they required more support to gather appropriate books and materials to use in implementing the curriculum.

## Instruction

High quality instruction was not evident throughout Harlem Link. Most teachers observed attempted to implement the workshop model for literacy using combinations of whole and small group instruction for mathematics. School inspectors observed rigorous tasks and activities that promoted higher order thinking skills in some classes. In those classes teachers presented inquiry based lessons and required students to explain strategies they used to solve problems. Teachers posed questions that required students to employ analytical and inferential skills. In other classrooms less than demanding pedagogy was observed. Teachers accepted wrong answers from students, asked questions requiring one word answers or did not have pivotal, sequential questions prepared in advance to guide student thinking and elicit information appropriate to the concepts being taught. In some classes, students called out, walked in and out of the classroom, argued with each other, threw books and were generally disengaged from the instruction being attempted. Inspectors observed other students who had selected a book that was too difficult for them to read independently. Students could not tell observers what reading level they were on when selecting their books for independent reading.

The report of the Institute's Second-Year Inspection Visit found that the co-teaching model in use at Harlem Link had not been fully developed. During the current visit, school leaders reported to inspectors that the model was more clearly defined. However, inspectors did not observe one model being consistently implemented in classrooms. Kindergarten teachers expressed that they were team teaching using both parallel teacher and lead/support models. First through third grade teachers were observed using parallel teacher, lead/support and teacher/assistant models. Teachers interviewed continued to indicate the need for more professional development in order to fully develop a school-wide approach to co-teaching. It was also expressed that, with the change of some classroom teams, teachers did not have enough time to become familiar with each other's strengths and teaching styles or to become comfortable enough with each other to be effective co-teachers.

## At-Risk Students

Harlem Link had interventions to help students who were struggling instructionally to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including classroom based interventions for students who required additional academic supports and programs for students eligible to receive special education programs and/or services. These interventions included having graduate students from Bank Street College act as tutors for struggling students. It was unclear to inspectors how the Harlem Link students were selected for tutoring services. Resources appeared to be sufficient to support and implement a range of services. However, because teachers did not fully understand how to specifically remediate the academic deficiencies of their students or to provide students with the appropriate interventions, these interventions and services for struggling students were only minimally effective at the time of the visit.

Harlem Link was organized with two sections of each grade from Kindergarten through third grade. One class in each grade was designated as a collaborative team teaching class (CTT) which integrated students with special needs, including students with identified disabilities, and students in regular education. Each CTT class was reported to have one special education teacher and one regular education teacher. However, because of staff changes, at least one CTT class did not have a teacher with specific training to work with students with special needs. School leaders reported that there were six students identified with disabilities in the lower school and seven students with disabilities in the upper school. There were nine students in the upper school who qualified for other

than special education services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. There was one student whose individualized education program (IEP) mandated SETSS (Special Education Teacher Support Service) services. That student was placed in the regular education portion of a CTT class and was reported to receive academic intervention services (AIS). The quality of service for these identified students was inconsistent from class to class. In the classrooms in which students were not engaged and teachers were not able to achieve an orderly instructional environment, these students were not effectively served.

In 2007-08 Harlem Link added a new position, student support coordinator, to support at-risk students and their teachers in meeting the needs of their students. The person in this position was charged to “craft a vision for inclusion for the school” and to develop a push-in model for providing services to students. The student support coordinator was also responsible for hiring a full-time social worker for the lower school. In addition, the coordinator observed and supervised all special education teachers, the social workers, the Title I reading and AIS teachers. Teachers reported that the student support coordinator provided support to the special education teachers in completing the IEP’s for identified students. The student support coordinator also organized the services of a consultant from the Cooke Center for Learning and Development, a provider of special education services to schools. The Cooke Center consultant worked with the collaborative team teachers (CTT) weekly to provide them with strategies to meet the instructional and behavioral needs of the students.

Support for struggling students who had not yet been referred for special education services was provided by the Title I reading teacher and the AIS specialist. These staff members provided the co-directors with information about the progress of at-risk students on a regular basis. Students were reported to be identified for Title I reading services based on their DRA and ECLAS scores and were served in either a push-in or pull-out model. The AIS specialist focused support on students in first and second grades who had been referred to the child study team (CST). These students were served based on a three tiered intervention system, and their progress was monitored or tracked using the school’s shared file server. In tier one, students received small group instruction in their classes and were assessed every four weeks. In tier two, students received more focused interventions, such as AIS push in or pull out instruction or one to one tutoring. While in tier two, students were tracked for two months and assessed twice a week. If there was insufficient progress, students would move into tier three and a special education referral would be considered. Intervention services observed did not necessarily address specific skill deficiencies of students. Further, the interventions were primarily provided in the regular classrooms. School inspectors concluded that, while the intervention program at Harlem Link was promising, regular classroom teachers and direct support providers required more training to provide the level of intervention and instruction to struggling students needed to help them become academically proficient in their areas of weakness.

#### Use of Assessment Data

Harlem Link administrators indicated that they had “not developed a way to evaluate what was working” within the school-wide assessment program. They expressed that their goal was not to rely solely on standardized tests but to put more weight on informal assessments administered throughout the school. The co-directors said that the informal assessments created and administered by individual teachers and grade level teams may be “different in style but not in substance.” Notwithstanding these sentiments, teachers did not have a clear understanding of the purpose and importance of all assessments nor did they have enough training to develop and administer informal assessments substantively. The assessment program and the addition of an assessment coordinator at

Harlem Link had the potential to provide many kinds of valuable data to improve the instructional program. However, the inconsistent administration of assessments, the unreliable collection of data and the need for more professional development for teachers prevented the assessment program from accomplishing its intended goals.

Harlem Link continued to collect a large amount of student performance data during the 2007-08 school year. The co-directors developed an assessment program for Harlem Link that included school administered formative, summative and progress monitoring assessments, including data from student conferencing and from portfolios. Harlem Link administered the ECLAS and the DRA three times per year and the Terra Nova one time per year. In response to concerns expressed in the report of the Institute's Second-Year Inspection Visit, and because third grade students would be taking the New York State assessments for the first time, the new position of assessment coordinator was added to the Harlem Link organization. The role of the assessment coordinator was to help third grade teachers prepare their students for the New York State assessments and to score the assessments after they were administered. Coordinating the administration of ECLAS, DRA and Terra Nova was also the responsibility of the assessment coordinator. Additionally, the assessment coordinator was charged with analyzing the data from all of the assessments, helping teachers to interpret and use the data to improve their instruction to meet the needs of their students, and informing the board of trustees. The assessment coordinator met twice a month with teachers in each grade level to "find out what they needed" and to provide some direction for them.

Teachers indicated that the assessment coordinator and the consultant mathematics staff developer were supportive resources. The assessment coordinator prepared data reports for them and the staff developer helped them interpret and utilize the data from the unit tests and other mathematics assessments. However, teachers reported that they were not able to meet with the assessment coordinator and staff developer often enough to assist them with daily data-based instruction. School inspectors concluded that while teachers received more support than in prior years, they still needed more training to analyze their assessment data and utilize the data effectively to support instruction.

Teachers reported that the data from the DRA presented an accurate picture of student performance and was useful for forming guided reading groups. Teachers also administered running records informally to obtain additional information for grouping. Teachers said that only some of the ECLAS subtests provided valuable information, such as the Phonemic Awareness Strand, and that others were either not relevant or duplicated information retrieved from the DRA. Additionally, the administrators made the decision to allow teachers to administer the DRA to their own students. The co-directors determined that the significant amount of time required to administer both the DRA and ECLAS would diminish time spent on instruction. As a result, they assigned the assessment coordinator and associate deans, who are not trained as teachers, the task of administering selected sections of the ECLAS to the students. Teachers expressed skepticism about the reliability of the results of those sections. Further, it was reported that the results of ECLAS were presented to parents at conferences but were not included on the report card.

Another assessment strategy, used as part of the Workshop Model of instruction employed in Harlem Link classrooms, was the student conference. Teachers regularly met with individual students while the others were reading independently to assess what students understood and what students needed to learn. Results of conferencing generally help teachers to monitor students' progress and inform their instructional decisions. School inspectors observed that conferencing was implemented in an inconsistent manner throughout the school using different forms and protocols. There was no school-

wide system for conferencing observed. Further, some teachers reported that there was often not enough time to adequately maintain conference notes and they were not held accountable for their quantity or quality. It might have been helpful for teachers to use the data gleaned through conferencing to group students and create future lessons to meet their instructional needs.

Portfolios were also reported to be part of the Harlem Link assessment program. Inspectors observed that while there was a potentially well-designed protocol for the selection of student work to be included, the portfolios were not maintained in the classrooms. At the time of the visit, student work had recently been removed and samples scheduled to be included based on the protocol had not been selected.

Staff indicated that there was not as much assessment data for progress in mathematics as there was for literacy. Checklists and pre- and post-unit tests from the Investigations program were used to assess student progress in mathematics. The assessment coordinator reported that Harlem Link was working on creating an interim mathematics assessment.

Teachers began to use rubrics to grade students' work in various curriculum areas during the 2007-08 school year. School inspectors concluded that the use of rubrics at Harlem Link was not effective. Some ready-made rubrics were used as part of the Investigations mathematics program. Previously developed rubrics were also available from the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project used by some teachers during Writers' Workshop. Other English language arts and social studies rubrics were developed by grade level teams with the support of the assessment coordinator. Visit inspectors found that the use of rubrics was inconsistent from class-to-class and there was no alignment of rubrics throughout the grades. Teachers were unclear about how to use rubrics as tools for assessment of student progress and roadmaps for pupil performance. Teachers interviewed did not have a knowledge of the New York State fourth grade writing rubrics which provide interim benchmarks for performance from which benchmarks in preceding grades could be crafted.

### Professional Development

School inspectors found the overall professional development program at Harlem Link to be active but fragmented and inadequate to meet the needs of teachers. Harlem Link did not have sufficient school-based resources targeted to support a comprehensive program of professional development in instruction, assessment and classroom management. Further, the existing program did not provide sufficient systematic, continuous support and training to teachers. Modeling and coaching were part of the professional development program but were not employed consistently.

While some training was provided by the dean of students, teachers and school staff expressed that the professional development provided to implement the school-wide discipline program and policy was insufficient. Selected training had been conducted during the previous summer but had not been continued. This resulted in the discipline policy and procedures being implemented in an inconsistent and ineffective manner.

Teachers were very positive about the professional development offered in English language arts and even more enthusiastic about the support in mathematics. Professional development in English language arts was provided by a consultant from the Bank Street College faculty who came to Harlem Link approximately one day per week for thirty days per year. She worked with all teachers from Kindergarten through third grade. The English language arts consultant indicated that she spent

three week periods at the lower school and the other days primarily focused on second and third grade. She visited the first grade teachers infrequently. The model she used included working in the classrooms, observing teachers' practices, providing feedback and meeting with teachers during their lunch periods or during common preparation periods. The English language arts consultant supported the teachers through discussions about the sequence of instruction within the instructional units developed and discussions about actual instructional techniques and strategies for teaching literacy. It was also reported that she attempted to provide support for conferencing with students, administering and using DRA assessment data and planning instruction in literacy. Teachers valued the support but indicated that it was not sufficient to meet their diverse instructional needs.

Professional development in mathematics was provided by a consultant from the City College program, Math in the City. The mathematics consultant also came to Harlem Link one day each week to support teachers with the implementation of the Investigations mathematics program. The mathematics consultant said that she tried to link literacy with mathematics and that she focused on helping teachers differentiate instruction to meet their students' needs. She reported that she worked with all grades using a protocol which included observing teachers' practices, providing feedback, modeling appropriate strategies, meeting with teachers to plan mathematics lessons and supporting teachers in record keeping continual assessment. The mathematics consultant also facilitated professional development for the co-directors and the lower school director one day every other month at City College. Additionally, the new Kindergarten teachers were involved in a mathematics learning community in which they planned lessons together and developed curriculum. The mathematics consultant led that effort for teachers in first through third grades. Teachers and administrators universally praised the work and the efforts of the mathematics consultant as exemplary. It was very important to them that she modeled best practices which made the training and support very practical. However, teachers all felt that they needed more support and assistance that was more frequent.

The consultant from the Cooke Center for Learning and Development was also part of the overall professional development program at Harlem Link. Special education teachers mentioned that the consultant from the Cooke Center observed students and provided them with strategies to manage at risk children in the classrooms. It was noted that the student support coordinator also provided some professional development to special education teachers, including modeling appropriate strategies for students.

School inspectors found that Harlem Link utilized outside consultants as their primary source of professional development for teachers. Teachers reported that they did not have enough time with the consultants on an ongoing basis. Teachers universally praised the modeling of instructional strategies in their classrooms as the most helpful and supportive to them. The inspection team found that the Harlem Link leadership was not using the consultants to build the capacity of school staff to continue the professional development when they were not there. Teachers also reported the need for more professional development on co-teaching which can be an effective instructional methodology when properly supported.

Inspectors also found that the professional development program at Harlem Link was not cohesive. Each consultant did not use the same model for professional development and did not provide the same level of support. The consultants met with the co-directors during their day at Harlem Link, but there were no regularly scheduled meetings that involved all professional development providers, including staff and consultants, to share progress, observations and next steps.

The co-directors reported that they participated in professional development opportunities provided by the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence and by the Empowerment Network at the New York City Department of Education. Support staff indicated that, upon request, they were also permitted to attend training sessions that they could identify as important to their continued development. School inspectors found that more professional development was needed by out-of-classroom specialists to increase their ability to provide effective support for students and teachers.

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

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

The co-directors are the driving force behind Harlem Link. They have a vision of increasing the academic achievement for underserved children through a supportive collaboration among staff, families and community. The Harlem Link mission is largely communicated through the co-directors to staff and parents. They have worked at communicating the mission and vision of the school during grade team meetings to, "ensure that the instructional vision is happening." In addition, they have communicated their vision and the mission of the school through the recruitment of such staff as the lower school director and the selection of the newer professional development consultants.

Many of the key design elements had been successfully addressed. These included forging relationships with community based organizations that could provide needed services for students. Harlem Link had partnered with community institutions such as the Police Athletic League (PAL), Mount Morris Park, the Children's Aid Society, Antioch Baptist Church, New Song Community Partnership and the Piano School for after school services. Fieldwork was still being incorporated into the school program, particularly in the area of social studies. The co-teaching model was being implemented in Harlem Link. Other key design elements were evident but had not been fully realized at the time of the visit, such as data driven instruction and high levels of professional development.

Despite the mission of the school, the school inspectors found that staff and parents do not believe that they are included in either crafting the vision or involved in developing the programs and policies needed to fulfill Harlem Link's mission of collaboration and shared decision-making. The co-directors were not always able to communicate the full scope of the mission and how it would be achieved to parents and staff although teachers did indicate that "there [Harlem Link] is a good environment where concerns could be brought." However, teachers and support staff reported that the co-directors were very open to hearing their concerns and suggestions; however, some frustration was expressed that ultimately decisions made by the co-directors did not seem to reflect teacher input. This resulted in changing priorities that were not made clear to everyone. Teachers indicated that "they'd like it made clear and intentional what the school-wide priorities are."

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

Harlem Link had not developed a mechanism to survey the parents or to systematically assess their opinions and concerns. The six parents interviewed unanimously expressed their satisfaction with Harlem Link's caring and nurturing environment. They expressed that "people knew their kids." One parent indicated that "if there is an issue, they focus on getting the children through the problems." Another parent, who was unable to secure IEP driven related services for his child in public school, expressed satisfaction at the services being provided at Harlem Link. Some parents had positive attitudes about what their children were learning and indicated that the children were progressing academically. All of the parents interviewed were satisfied with the teachers. They indicated that teachers "gave parents strategies" to work with their children at home.

Parents interviewed expressed concerns that students were coming home with folders rather than textbooks. Parents indicated that the reasons for this had not been explained to them. Others



indicated that they wanted more information about the assessments, including when they occurred and what were their children's results. They wanted more regular feedback on the progress of their children's learning. The parents interviewed stated that "the school needed more consistency. Rules were being changed abruptly." One parent articulated that the intentions of the school leaders were good, but that "the school needed a consistent template for handling decisions." They also felt that the administration should listen more to the teachers.

Another parent commented that "the climate in the building is one of micro management." The overriding sentiment was that communication between administration, teachers and parents was not effective and needed to be improved. The parents were unhappy about staff changes and, although there was written communication to parents about the changes, they were still unclear as to the reasons for the changes that impacted their children directly. They all said that "they liked the school and wanted it to continue" but one parent indicated that "when the communication fails, the vision goes blind."

Six students interviewed expressed that they liked their teachers. Students did include teachers among the persons to whom they would turn if they needed help with their school work. However, they were unaware of whether or not they were performing academically at grade level and could not articulate whether work samples they had completed met standards. Students did indicate that the biggest problem for them in the school was the learning time lost in class because of distractions resulting from other students' behavior. They said that there were too many interruptions which prevented them from doing their work in class.

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

While the report of the Institute's Second-Year Visit indicated that the school's board of trustees knew and understood its roles and responsibilities, visit inspectors found limited evidence to support this during the current visit. During their interview, board members did not articulate a clear set of responsibilities for providing oversight to the development and operation of Harlem Link. The newest member of the board was not able to provide much information about the board's priorities or school operations. She believed that her role included supporting the board by observing the instruction in Harlem Link classrooms and providing feedback to the teachers and the school leadership and reporting on the status of instruction to the board of trustees and to the school leaders. The president of the board of trustees confirmed the role of the new board member in providing the board with first hand information about curriculum and instruction as a result of her classroom visits.

The board president expressed that, based on the report from the Institute's visit last year, the board had seen some improvement but that it "wanted to see less time spent in developing groups to solve problems." He indicated that the co-directors were "bogged down in minutia which took them away from their mission." The board had concluded that there was a need to establish priorities. The boards' priorities are classroom management, hiring teachers, and the development of a strong special education component. The board identified the two greatest challenges faced by Harlem Link as retention of staff and the financial situation of the school. The board members interviewed indicated that there needed to be more fundraising since, at the time of the visit, there was only a small monetary reserve. There was a director of development for Harlem Link who worked only four days each week which the board members found insufficient. The board was very concerned about student achievement and indicated that the presentations they received were confusing and

unclear. The members also indicated that they did not receive regular reports about the results of school administered assessments, only confusing presentations.

The board had assigned a senior mentor to help the co-directors progress, but there was still no mechanism developed to evaluate the co-directors' performance. The board reported that, after being cited in the prior year's visit report, one board member was assigned the task of collecting examples of evaluations used by other charter school boards of trustees as models for developing an evaluation document for Harlem Link. However, at the time of the current visit, the process had not been completed and no evaluation tool had been developed. The board of trustees had also not developed any assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the Harlem Link instructional program and there was no ongoing system in place to hold the leadership accountable for the school's progress in meeting the Accountability Plan and school goals. The board members also acknowledged that there was no formal procedure for gauging parents' satisfaction with Harlem Link. Informal links to the community had been developed through one board member, who, as an employee of the school, served as an "ambassador" to the parents and community. He reported on his informal findings to the board of trustees.

## **VI. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL**

### Academic Program

An analysis of data collected during the inspection visit suggested to the inspection team that Harlem Link needed to establish clear academic priorities for curriculum, instruction and assessment and to communicate those priorities to all staff. The development of curriculum documents during summer 2007 was a positive step toward unifying the school instructionally. However, the absence of formal protocols to implement the curriculum uniformly across classes and grades hindered the effective implementation of the developed curriculum. Additionally, the lack of a single system for clinical supervision of teachers and staff prevented Harlem Link from implementing a cohesive, developmental instructional program for students from first through third grades. The Kindergarten teachers in the lower school were an exception; they were more consistently and regularly supervised by the lower school director. Student discipline issues permeated the school and, in some classes, prevented teaching and learning from occurring. In light of the predominance of unseasoned teachers, the professional development program does not adequately address the delivery of instruction, assessment and classroom management. While the co-teacher model had become more clearly defined, more consistency in the execution of the model across the school is needed to achieve maximum effectiveness.

### Organizational Viability

Harlem Link faces many challenges as it attempts to develop into a learning community. Staff selection and retention are extremely important if professional development of staff and continuity of instruction are to occur. At the time of the visit, there were many inexperienced teachers who needed guidance in understanding and implementing different phases of the academic program. While it is expected that new teachers will always need to be hired as Harlem Link adds additional grades, the retention of well-trained teachers is a key to developing consistency and institutional knowledge. During the visit, inspectors found that administrators had not developed pathways for clear communication with staff and parents. The visit team saw evidence of anger, suspicion and frustration among staff and parents toward the administrative team which will be a challenge to

address in order to develop a school-wide culture of trust and community in which every member plays a role to meet commonly agreed upon goals. It was unclear to what extent the high-profile teacher termination at the start of the school year contributed to the anger and frustration. The co-directors understood that more systems and standardized protocols needed to be created within the school for staff evaluation, for delivery of instruction, for assessment of students' progress and for the improvement of student order and discipline to support the growth and development of Harlem Link.

**APPENDIX A:**

**Framework for Report Discussion**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Report Section (Relevant Benchmark(s))</b>	<b>Evidence Sources</b>
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