



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Initial Renewal Report

The Grand Concourse Academy Charter School

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Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277
518/427-6510 (fax)
www.newyorkcharters.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPORT INTRODUCTION	1
RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY DISCUSSION	1
SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.....	8
ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT	12

The final version of Institute renewal reports should be broadly shared by the school with the entire school community. This report will be posted on the Institute's website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm.

REPORT INTRODUCTION

This report is the primary means by which the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) transmits to the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”) its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s application for renewal, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).¹

Information about the State University’s renewal process, including the Institute’s comprehensive Charter Renewal Handbook and an overview of the requirements for renewal under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended, the “Act”), are available on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.

RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Recommendation

Full-Term Renewal

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Trustees approve the application for renewal of the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School and renew its charter for a period of five years with authority to provide instruction to students in Kindergarten through 5th grade in such configuration as set forth in its application for renewal, with a maximum projected enrollment of 364 students.

Background and Required Findings

In initial renewal reviews, the State University Trustees evaluate the strength and effectiveness of a school’s academic program by the degree to which the school has succeeded in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period² and by the quality of the instructional program in place at the school during the charter period, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks (a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks). In giving weight to both student achievement and the emergent program, this approach provides a balance between an outcome-based system of accountability in which a school is held accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results and a determination of the likelihood that the educational program will improve student learning and achievement going forward.

The Grand Concourse Academy Charter School (“Grand Concourse Academy” or “GCA”) has applied for an initial, Full-Term Renewal of five years. The State University Renewal Practices provide three possible renewal outcomes for GCA: Full-Term Renewal; Short term Renewal; or Non-Renewal. In order to earn a Full-Term Renewal, GCA must demonstrate that it has met the criteria for such a renewal as described in the State University Renewal Practices. Specifically, the school must either: (a) have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or coming close to

¹ The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised June 9, 2008) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

² For the purpose of reporting student achievement results, the Accountability Period is defined in the State University Renewal Practices as the time the Accountability Plan was in effect. In the case of an initial renewal, the plan covers the first four years that the school was in operation during the charter period.

meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals, *and* have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is generally effective; or (b) have made progress towards meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals *and* have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is particularly strong and effective.

Based on the Institute's review of the evidence that it gathered and that GCA has provided including, but not limited to, the school's Application for Renewal, and the school's record of academic performance as determined by Accountability Plan academic goal attainment, the Institute finds that the school has had a strong record of meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the Accountability Period and has had in place an educational program during the charter period that is generally effective.

Based on all the evidence submitted in the current charter term and as described in, or submitted with, the application for renewal, the Institute makes the following findings required by the Act. The Grand Concourse Academy Charter School as described in the renewal application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner in the next charter period. Finally, given the programs it will offer, its structure and its purpose, approving the school to operate for another five years is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2).

Therefore, in accordance with the standard for initial renewal found in the State University Renewal Practices, the Institute recommends that the State University Trustees approve Grand Concourse Academy's application for charter renewal and renew the charter for a full term of five years.

Consideration of School District Comments

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the school district in which the charter school is located regarding the school's application for renewal. As of the date of this report, no comments were received in response.

Summary Discussion

Academic Success

Grand Concourse Academy Charter School has met the academic goals in its Accountability Plan. Since the school began administering the state's English language arts and mathematics exams in the second year of its charter period, it has met the mathematics goal each year and met the English language arts goal in the last two years. Based on limited data, GCA has also met its science and social studies goals during the Accountability Period. According to the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system, the school is deemed to be in good standing and has been identified as a rapidly improving school.

Over the last two years of its Accountability Period, GCA has demonstrated consistently strong achievement on the state's English language arts exam. The school has exceeded its targets for absolute proficiency, as well as the target set by the state for all public schools under its NCLB accountability system. The school has far-outperformed its local community school district and demographically similar schools state-wide. In the last year, it did not register year-to-year growth on the exam, but was still performing at a high level.

During the last three years, from the time GCA first began administering the state's mathematics exam, it has recorded solid results on the state's mathematics exam. The school surpassed its absolute targets with more than 90 percent of its students scoring at the proficient level in the last two years. The school has far-outperformed its local community school district and demographically similar schools state-wide in all three years.

Based on previous annual evaluation reports and a renewal inspection visit, the Institute concludes that GCA has had in place during most of the charter period and at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is generally effective.

GCA has strong instructional leadership, establishing a culture of high academic and behavioral expectations that is understood by teachers, parents, and students. The leadership team has set goals in line with the school's Accountability Plan and has taken action in line with these priorities. There has been a comprehensive system in place for teacher evaluations that provides direct feedback to teachers. Teachers find the feedback constructive and supportive.

Teachers and administrators are aware of the academic needs of students and are making a concerted effort to improve their skills, as evidenced by the attention given by teachers and administrators to assessment data. GCA's leadership is steadfastly focused on meeting the academic goals listed in the school's Accountability Plan. The leadership has responded to questions and concerns identified in previous Institute reports by evaluating and revising the academic program in light of the standards for renewal.

Teachers have reported that the principal and other instructional support staff are regularly and frequently present in their classrooms. Teachers understand the expectations for student learning and report receiving ongoing verbal and written feedback on the quality of their instruction. The school has a comprehensive, effective system for evaluating teacher quality that is based on regular informal Learning Walks, Performance Review Check Sheets, and formal evaluations. The principal, whose written evaluations indicate close observation, has been able to articulate a specific assessment of the skills and capacity of each instructional staff person.

GCA has a comprehensive system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. It administers monthly criterion-referenced ELA and math assessments, which are used for student grouping, targeting remedial intervention, and monitoring teacher delivery of the curriculum. The school augments these assessments with standardized tests aligned to state standards in order to predict student performance on state exams. The school's leaders use assessment data to monitor, change, and improve the school's academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services.

GCA's teachers made limited use of the bi-monthly assessments during the first years of the charter, but have more recently started to use them as a tool to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of individual students. Teacher evaluations indicate that the principal has communicated clear goals for student performance on both state and interim assessments. When lower-than-expected performance appears to be class- or grade-wide, the school's leadership has taken specific steps, such as reassigning instructional responsibilities, to improve performance. The school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.

GCA has clearly defined, textbook-based curricula that it uses to prepare students to meet state performance standards. The school utilizes the Scott Foresman core curriculum content for English language arts and mathematics, and to the extent that teachers follow the textbook series faithfully, the curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and aligned with the school's stated mission. Teachers are aware of the curricula that they are responsible for teaching and have access to pacing charts and pre-assessment packets that guide development of their lesson plans. The renewal inspection team found the recently developed science and social studies curricula to be particularly coherent and well-organized. In these two subjects, the curricula include clear pacing of units, lesson topics and objectives, as well as references to relevant pages in textbooks and teacher editions.

Based on annual evaluation reports issued during the charter period, teachers have delivered instruction efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson. Teachers have demonstrated an understanding of the current knowledge and skill level of their students, and students who are struggling with a lesson receive direct attention. At the time of the renewal inspection visit, the school's co-teaching model, intended to facilitate ability grouping and focused mathematics and English language arts instruction, was evident throughout the school. However, the evaluation team observed little evidence of instruction designed to elicit higher order thinking, probing to illuminate the thought process, or informal assessment to evaluate learning.

GCA is effective in helping students who are struggling academically. The school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs. The school employs teacher assistants, teacher associates, and subject area specialists to provide additional help in classrooms during the English language arts and mathematics blocks as well as intervention services for students pulled out of classes during academic-intervention periods. The Title I coordinator (who is also the assessment coordinator) assigns students among the support staff for additional remedial intervention in the afternoon. Teachers understand the eligibility criteria, intervention procedures, and services available to students at risk of academic failure. As noted above, the structuring of Title I intervention time is coordinated with the regular daily schedule, and the assessments provide guidance for the support teachers.

The school uses state assessments, interim monthly assessments, practice tests, teacher evaluations, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (in the lower grades) as screening instruments to determine which students may need additional academic support through Title 1 services. The school has delivered limited support through differentiated instruction during regular class time. More substantial support has come during supplemental instruction times including academic intervention periods in the afternoons and Saturday classes that meet for approximately six weeks prior to the administration of state assessments.

GCA has devoted substantial time, personnel and resources to professional development. The school identifies topics appropriately based on both student performance information and staff interests. It places a high priority on achieving the goals of the Accountability Plan and fulfilling the expectations for renewal. The school staff handbook emphasizes that professional development is an integral part of supporting teachers' growth with a strong emphasis on content knowledge acquisition and effective process strategies. The program is intended to increase teachers' pedagogical skills while offering classroom-based support through modeling, demonstrations, and feedback. As a result, the content of professional development activities generally aligns well with the school's mission, curriculum and instructional programs. Teachers have an array of opportunities, including individual mentoring, on-going weekly sharing of best practices, and monthly half-day workshops. The school's professional development program has improved noticeably since the early years of the

charter with the school's administration being more responsive to teacher requests for professional development support.

Organizational Effectiveness and Viability

The school faithfully pursues its primary educational and developmental goals of creating “a challenging learning environment that addresses meet[ing] the learning needs of students in New York City, especially those at risk of academic failure,” and fostering “a sense of strong character and personal responsibility.” Stakeholders including teachers, parents and school leadership were aware of, and strongly support, the school's priorities. With respect to specific subject matter, the school is also faithful to its plan to “diligently seek to prepare students to meet and/or exceed New York State performance standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.” On the other hand, while Spanish and music have been offered consistently throughout the charter period, the content of the instruction in these two subjects has not been provided in a way that has enabled students to “demonstrate advanced skill in music and be able to converse in Spanish,” as stated in its charter.

The school has a well-functioning organizational structure with systems and procedures that allow the staff to implement the academic program effectively. The leadership demonstrates sound management of day-to-day operations and consistently allocates resources in support of achieving the school's educational goals. The school's high expectations are generally reflected in clear lines of accountability for instructional staff hiring and retention. The school board and leadership have identified succession as a critical organizational capacity issue for the subsequent renewal term and have not yet defined roles and responsibilities or made personnel decisions as part of such a plan.

Student enrollment continues to be strong and the school has fostered a positive reputation throughout the community. Stakeholders frequently acknowledged the effectiveness of the school leadership in communicating expectations clearly, consistently and fairly whether in the context of individual student performance, teacher evaluations, or school-wide results. Parents were proud of the school's reputation and place in the community with one parent describing it as an “anchor.”

GCA has been exemplary in regularly communicating each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians and in communicating overall school performance to parents and the school community. Parents reported that they receive regular, detailed information about student performance including interim assessment results that indicate whether specific skills have been mastered. They were also well informed about overall student performance. Parents praised the school's practice of communicating concerns quickly and clearly to families where students are at risk of not meeting grade-level performance expectations. In such cases, the school worked even more closely with families to monitor and maintain communication about a student's progress throughout the year.

The school has a formal process for evaluating parent satisfaction each year in addition to having ample informal lines of communication open to accommodate parent views. The great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have expressed strong positive attitudes in parental surveys. Parents reported feeling welcome at the school, finding both teachers and the leadership to be very accessible. In addition, parents spoke articulately about their commitment to, and support for, the school's high expectations for student learning. The long waiting list indicated that a large number of parents seek entrance to the school. Attendance and re-enrollment rates have been strong and few, if any, parents have pursued grievances at the board level or outside the school.

GCA's board of trustees is committed to fulfilling its responsibility to the community. It has worked effectively to further the school's mission and has provided appropriate oversight for the school's operation. School board members are well suited to fulfilling their obligations under the charter. In addition to having strong community relationships, the school board has demonstrated capacity to carry out its financial, real estate, legal compliance, and general non-profit governance obligations. The composition of the school board has been extremely stable over the term of the charter, enabling it to make a smooth transition when the founding board president stepped down to join the instructional staff at the school last year.

The school board is well informed about the school's status, drawing information from a range of sources including regular principal reports, academic performance data by grade, financial reports from the school's back office provider, communications from parents via PTA meetings and the board's parent representative, informal input from staff, and annual parent surveys.

The school board is aware of, and sensitive to, potential conflicts of interest stemming from two trustees' affiliation with the church in which one of the school buildings is housed. With the minor exception of currently not having a trustee who is an educator as required in the school's bylaws, the school board has complied with the provisions of its by-laws and code of ethics throughout the charter term. Minor modifications to each of the foregoing documents are recommended by the Institute at this time.

At the time of the renewal inspection the school presented comprehensive policies and procedures, which included some overlap between Victory Schools Inc. policies and specific school (or charter) policies. While some policies had been more recently updated others were in need of update or clarification including policies related to Freedom of Information Law, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, discipline (regular and special education), workplace issues and complaints. The school is to be commended on its bilingual (Spanish) parent manual and a comprehensive set of special education procedures.

With certain, minor exceptions the school appears to be, and appears to have been, in general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable state and federal law, rules and regulations, and the terms of its charter. A few, minor exceptions to full compliance with the Open Meetings Law, Freedom of Information Law, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act were noted. During and prior to the school's third year of operation, the State Education Department noted a few instances of non-compliance with the teacher certification and fingerprint provisions of the Act, which were subsequently remedied.

The school utilizes various *pro bono* counsel as a legal resource, and has done so successfully. In addition two members of the school's board are attorneys.

Fiscal Soundness

GCA is in good financial condition and has been stable throughout its existence including during the expansion of its main building and the leasing of additional space. The school operates pursuant to a long-range fiscal plan and has produced realistic budgets over the term of the charter. The school's record of financial reporting has been exemplary. Each required report has been submitted on-time and has been complete and accurate. The school has not been cited for any material financial or internal control weaknesses as part of its annual audits.

The school has successfully operated in a fiscally sound manner with Victory Schools, Inc. (VSI) providing limited, “back office” services since the charter school’s inception. VSI has assisted with the school’s finances, human resources and various compliance and legal matters. The largest service provided has been financial. The services include budgeting, payroll, purchasing, payables, receivables, cash flow management and back reconciliation.

GCA has given notice that it intends to end its relationship with VSI at the end of its current contract, which coincides with the end of the current charter. The school wishes to make this change for cost savings and greater convenience, believing that it can provide the services in-house and with outside vendors in a more cost-effective manner. Also, the school board and leadership stated that while the services provided during the start-up phase of the charter were valuable, the school has matured to the point where that level of outside assistance is no longer needed. The Institute notes that this is not a formal management company change under the charter agreement, as VSI never was engaged in that capacity.

The school has started to implement the transition to self financial management in the 2008-2009 school year with the help of Charter School Business Management, which has experience in such transitions with other charter schools. The school will also hire a full time bookkeeper, use ADP Total Source for human resource management and hire a consultant for compliance issues.

Plans for the Next Charter Period

GCA does not plan to add any new grades and would remain a K-5 school for the next charter period. The school would have a maximum enrollment of 364 students, which represents a slight decrease from current enrollment. The school, consistent with a charter provision the Institute is putting in place for all new charters, would also have the flexibility to increase or decrease its enrollment within a 20 percent margin. The school would follow the same curriculum, use the same mission statement, school year length, and abide by a similar organizational structure. The school board articulated a desire to expand the school to a K-8 school at some point in the future.

GCA has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan that is likely achievable. The plan projects an operating surplus and cash flow surpluses in each year. The school’s plan to transition away from VSI for certain services is fully outlined in its budgets and is predicted to yield a net surplus. The Institute finds those plans feasible and notes that the school has already begun the process of finding replacement services.

To the extent that GCA has achieved its key academic goals, continues to implement an educational program that supports achieving those goals, operates an effective and viable organization, and is fiscally sound, its plans to continue to implement the educational program as currently constituted during the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School on May 18, 2004, and it was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on July 21 of that same year. The school opened in September of 2004 at 116-118 East 169th Street in the Bronx serving 181 students in Kindergarten through second grade. The school added grade three in 2005-06 for a total enrollment of 234 students, grade four in 2006-07 for a total enrollment of 285 students and grade five in 2007-08 for a total enrollment of 376 students.

The mission statement for Grand Concourse Academy is as follows:

The mission of the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School is to create a challenging learning environment that addresses and meets the learning needs of students in New York City, especially those at risk of academic failure.

In a concentrated effort to prepare our students for entry into the very best middle and high schools of New York City, the Academy will seek to foster a sense of strong character, ethics, and personal responsibility, as well as high expectations and academic success.

The Academy will place a strong emphasis on music, math, science, and foreign languages, and will diligently seek to prepare students to meet and/or exceed New York State performance standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. In addition, Academy students will demonstrate an advanced skill in music and be able to converse in Spanish. The school will align and adjust student learning to the State performance standards, and use a variety of assessments to measure student progress in skills and content learning.

The Academy will support and encourage professional development opportunities aligned to the instructional program and will diligently seek and encourage active parental involvement and participation in the academic goals of the student. In addition, the school will seek to involve and engage a variety of community organizations and community leaders as partners to enhance the academic success of every student.

According to the Executive Summary of the final chartered agreement, the school's educational philosophy is that "all children can become critical thinkers and life-long learners regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, creed, national origin, religion or ancestry." The charter states that Grand Concourse Academy will achieve its mission through the following key design elements of the school:

- standards-based, back-to-basics educational program;
- student-centered attention;
- extended day;
- high academic standards;
- professional opportunities for teachers;
- encourage innovative teaching methods;
- school uniforms; and
- performance-based accountability.

The school's academic program is built around the core subject areas and includes daily extended learning blocks for English language arts (150 minutes), mathematics (90 minutes), science (60 minutes) and social studies (45 minutes). Technology is embedded in the core subjects, the curriculum is broadened through the inclusion of physical education, Spanish and visual and performing arts. Each class includes no more than 26 students. The current program uses materials published by Scott Foresman (reading and mathematics) and Macmillan/McGraw Hill (science and social studies).

The school has a limited service contract with Victory Schools, Inc. to provide back office services, such as accounting and grants management. Victory is not involved in the provision of academic services or programs. Victory is also not involved in the evaluation of the school leader, school staff, or academic program. Victory Schools currently serves as the education management organization for three schools chartered by the State University Trustees: Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem, Merrick Academy - Queens Public Charter School, and The Academy Charter School to be opened in Hempstead, Long Island in the fall of 2009.

School Year

180 days

School Day

8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment³	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2004-05	175		181	K-2		K-2	YES
2005-06	225		234	K-3		K-3	YES
2006-07	275		285	K-4		K-4	YES
2007-08	275	330	344	K-4	K-5	K-5	YES
2008-09	275	335	376	K-4	K-5	K-5	YES ⁴

	2005-2006			2006-2007	
Race/Ethnicity	% of Enroll. Grand Concourse	% of Enroll. CSD 9		% of Enroll. Grand Concourse	% of Enroll. CSD 9
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0.9%	1.0%		0.0%	0.0%
Black (Not Hispanic)	54.9%	34.0%		52.0%	34.0%
Hispanic	42.9%	63.0%		44.0%	63.0%
White	1.3%	1.0%		0.0%	1.0%

Source: NYSED Report Card (2006-07)

³ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2004-05 School Report Card, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, cited the same enrollment of 180 students for 2004-05. The NYSED 2005-06 database cited an enrollment of 233.

⁴ While the projected enrollment under the current charter would cap enrollment at 360 students, the Institute submitted a lower projected enrollment to the State Education Department as part of the charter revision; the result of a mathematical error in the original chart. The Institute saw no need to correct that figure because it was within the range allowed by the charter. However, the Institute inadvertently did not make the school aware of such change. As a result, while the school stayed within what it thought was the enrollment range, it did not stay within the actual collar. The Institute will take no further action with respect to this matter.

	2004-2005			2005-2006			2006-2007	
Free/Reduced Lunch	No. of Students	% of Enroll.		No. of Students	% of Enroll.		No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	135	74.6%		188	80.70%		191	67.00%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	31	13.3%		34	14.60%		41	14.00%

Source: NYSED Report Cards (2004-05 and 2005-06)

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1 st Year	2004-05	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2005-06	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2006-07	3 rd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter – 4 th Year	2007-08	4 th	NO		Increase in Enrollment and Grades Approved
Original Charter – 5 th Year	2008-09	5 th	YES	Renewal Visit	Recommended for Full-Term Renewal of five years

ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Background

At the beginning of the charter period the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. The plan also included an NCLB goal. For each goal in the Accountability Plan specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. Furthermore, the Institute has established a set of required outcome measures that include the following three types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the growth in student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of grade level cohorts. The following table shows the outcome measures currently required by the Institute in each subject area goal, as well as for the NCLB goal. Schools may have also elected to include additional optional goals and measures in their Accountability Plan.

Summary of Required Goals and Outcome Measures in Elementary/Middle School (K-8) Accountability Plans					
GOAL	Required Outcome Measures				
	Absolute		Comparative		Growth
	75 percent proficient on state exam	Performance Index (PI) meets Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)	Percent proficient greater than that of local school district	School exceeds predicted level of performance compared to similar public schools by small Effect Size	Grade-level cohorts reduce by half the gap between prior year's percent proficient and 75 percent
English Language Arts	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Mathematics	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Science	✦		✦		
Social Studies	✦		✦		
NCLB	School is deemed in "Good Standing" under state's NCLB accountability system				

The most important criterion for renewal is academic success, which is demonstrated in large part by meeting or coming close to meeting the goals in a school's Accountability Plan. The Institute determines the outcome of a goal by evaluating the multiple measures associated with that goal.

The following presentation indicates the outcome of each of the school's goals, as well as an analysis of the respective measures for each goal during the Accountability Period.⁵ Italicized text indicates goals or measures as written in the school's Accountability Plan; bold numbers appearing in the

⁵ Because the renewal decision is made in the last year of a Charter Period, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the Charter Period. For initial renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the Charter Period. For subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous Charter Period through the next to last year of the current Charter Period.

tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was achieved in a given year. Aside from required Accountability Plan measures, the following also presents the results of optional measures that the school may have included in its plan.

English Language Arts

Accountability Plan Goal: *All students at the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School will become proficient in reading and writing of the English Language.*

Outcome: Grand Concourse has met its English language arts goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year, 75 percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State ELA examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Tested: 24)	2006-07 (Tested: 67)	2007-08 (Tested: 130)
3	-	58.3	75.7	79.2
4	-	-	100.0	59.4
5	-	-	-	90.5
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	58.3	88.6	76.2

Grand Concourse did not have state testing grades in 2004-05, the first year of its Accountability Period. In 2005-2006 when Grand Concourse had only one testing grade, the school achieved a proficiency rate of 58 percent on the state's 3rd grade English language arts exam, below the target of 75 percent. However, in the subsequent two years, the school surpassed the proficiency target and achieved proficiency rates of 89 percent in 2006-07 and 76 percent in 2007-08. Notably, in 2006-2007 both tested grades exceeded the overall target, with 4th grade students achieving a proficiency rate of 100 percent.

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State ELA exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06⁶ (Tested: 47)	2006-07 (Tested: 71)	2007-08 (Tested: 150)
PI	-	149	185	178
AMO	-	122	122	133

Grand Concourse has surpassed the English language arts Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state as part of its NCLB accountability system during each year of its Accountability Period in which the school had state testing grades.

⁶ In 2005-06 English language arts and mathematics testing began in grades 3-8, and the Performance Index was henceforth calculated based on the aggregate of all tested students.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State ELA exam will be greater than that of all students in the same tested grades in local school district #9.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4)	2007-08 (Grades 3-5)
School	-	58.3	86.6	76.2
District	-	45.2	39.5	43.9

Grand Concourse has outperformed its local school district on the state English language arts exam during each of the last three years. In 2007-08 the school outperformed its district by more than 30 percentage points.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance on the State ELA exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3) (Tested: 47)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4) (Tested: 71)	2007-08 (Grades 3-5) (Tested: 150)
Predicted	-	50.4	55.2	58.5
Actual	-	51.1	87.1	78.0
Effect Size	-	0.04	2.25	1.47

In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Grand Concourse performed much better than expected on the state English language arts exam in the last two years. In 2005-06, the school performed at about the same level as predicted, and did not exceed its 0.3 Effect Size target. In 2006-07 and 2007-08, the school improved its performance, outperforming demographically similar schools by a large degree with Effect Sizes of 2.25 and 1.47, respectively.

Growth Measure: <i>Each year, each grade-level cohort will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State ELA exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State ELA exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, that cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Percent Level 3 & 4	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07⁷ (Grade 4) (N=40)	2007-08 (Grade 4-5) (N= 55)
Baseline	-	-	52.5	87.3
Target	-	-	63.8	87.4
Actual	-	-	97.5	70.9
Cohorts Made Target	-	-	(1 of 1)	(0 of 2)

⁷ New York State began administering English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8 in 2005-06, thus year-to-year growth could not be evaluated until 2006-07 when two years' of results were first available.

Grand Concourse has not consistently attained its English language arts growth targets. In 2006-07, when the school had only one grade-level cohort with two years of results, the cohort's proficiency rate increased over 40 percentage points to 98 percent of students scoring proficient or higher, eclipsing its target. However, in 2007-08 neither of two cohorts achieved their target, and overall performance declined.

Analysis of Optional Measure

Growth Measure: <i>Cohorts of the charter school's students will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline performance and grade level on the reading battery of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) (Grades K, 1, 2).</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Mean NCE	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grades 1-3)	2006-07 (Grades 1-3) (N= 167)	2007-08
Baseline	-	NA	53.9	-
Target	-	NA	54.0	-
Actual	-	NA	48.9	-
Cohorts Made Target	-	(0 of 3)	(1 of 3)	-

Though Grand Concourse has a growth measure in its Accountability Plan based on ITBS standardized test results, results are only available for two of the four years in their Accountability Period. In 2005-06 none of the three grade level cohorts achieved its target, and only the 1st grade performed above the national norm. In 2006-07 one of three cohorts achieved its target, and two cohorts performed just above the national norm. Results were unavailable for the other two years in the school's Accountability Period.

Mathematics

Accountability Plan Goal: *All students at the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School will become proficient in Mathematics.*

Outcome: Grand Concourse has met its mathematics goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year, 75 percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Math examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Tested: 24)	2006-07 (Tested: 66)	2007-08 (Tested: 129)
3	-	75.0	91.9	98.7
4	-	-	93.1	90.9
5	-	-	-	90.5
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	75.0	92.4	95.3

In all three years during which the school had testing grades, at least 75 percent of students scored at the proficient level or higher on the state exam, exceeding the 75 percent target. In 2005-06 exactly 75 percent of 3rd grade students scored at the proficient level. Performance increased in subsequent years; in 2006-07 and 2007-08, all tested grades achieved proficiency rates greater than 90 percent.

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State Math exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Tested: 47)	2006-07 (Tested: 70)	2007-08 (Tested: 150)
PI	-	179	192	195
AMO	-	86	86	102

Grand Concourse has exceeded the mathematics AMO in each of the last three years. In 2006-07 and 2007-08, the school posted Performance Index scores of 192 and 195 respectively, just below the highest possible score of 200.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the percent of all tested students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Math exam will be greater than that of all students in the same tested grades in local school district #9.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3)	2006-07 (Grade 3-4)	2007-08 (Grades 3-5)
School	-	75.0	92.4	95.3
District	-	60.8	65.4	71.4

Grand Concourse has outperformed its local school district by at least 10 percentage points on the state mathematics exam during each of the last three years for which the school had state testing results. In 2007-08, the school outperformed its district by almost 25 percentage points.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance on the State Math exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3) (Tested: 47)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4) (Tested: 70)	2007-08 (Grades 3-5) (Tested: 150)
Predicted	-	65.5	75.4	81.1
Actual	-	80.9	92.8	94.7
Effect Size	-	0.87	1.18	1.08

In comparison to demographically similar schools state-wide, Grand Concourse has performed much better than predicted on the state mathematics exam, exceeding the Effect Size target of 0.3 in each of the last three years. The school performed better than predicted to a large degree in 2005-06 with an Effect Size of 0.87. This increased to 1.18 the following year and remained at about the same level in 2007-08.

Growth Measure: <i>Each year, each grade-level cohort will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State Math exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State Math exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, that cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Percent Level 3 & 4	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07⁸ (Grade 4) (N=39)	2007-08 (Grades 4-5) (N=55)
Baseline	-	-	76.9	92.7
Target	-	-	77.0	92.8
Actual	-	-	94.9	90.9
Cohorts Made Target	-	-	(1 of 1)	(0 of 2)

In terms of growth on the state exam, in 2006-07 the school's 4th grade cohort achieved its target and improved from 90 to 93 percent proficient. The following year neither of two cohorts achieved their targets, and overall performance declined slightly, though to a level still well above the 75 percent absolute target.

Analysis of Optional Measure

Growth Measure: <i>Cohorts of the charter school's students will reduce by one-half the gap between their baseline performance and grade level on the math battery of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) (Grades K, 1, 2).</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Mean NCE	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06 (Grades 1-3)	2006-07 (Grades 1-3) (N= 167)	2007-08
Baseline	-	No Aggregate	44.7	-
Target	-	Data Available	47.4	-
Actual	-		49.0	-
Cohorts Made Target	-	(0 of 3)	(2 of 3)	-

Though Grand Concourse has a growth measure in its Accountability Plan based on ITBS standardized test results, results are only available for two of the four years in their Accountability Period. In 2005-06 none of the three grade level cohorts achieved its target and none of the cohorts performed above the national norm. In 2006-07, two of three cohorts achieved their targets and overall performance approached the national norm.

Science

Accountability Plan Goal: *All students at Grand Concourse Academy Charter School will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.*

Outcome: Based on limited data, Grand Concourse met its science goal.

⁸ New York State began administering English language arts and mathematics exams in grades 3-8 in 2005-06, thus year-to-year growth could not be evaluated until 2006-07 when two years' of results were first available.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>Each school year commencing in 2006-2007, 75 percent of fourth grade students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (Tested: 29)	2007-08 (Tested: 32)
4	-	-	96.5	96.9
8	-	-	-	-

Grand Concourse first had a 4th grade class in 2006-07, and reported that 97 percent of students were proficient on the state's 4th grade science exam in both 2006-07 and 2007-08.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each year, the percent of fourth grade students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Science exam will be greater than that of fourth grade students in local school district #9.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (Grade 4)	2007-08 (Grade 4)
School	-	-	96.5	96.9
District	-	-	59.0	-

In 2006-07, Grand Concourse exceeded the performance of local Community School District 9 on the state science exam by nearly 40 percentage points. Comparison data for 2007-08 are currently unavailable.

Social Studies

Accountability Plan Goal: *All students at Grand Concourse Academy Charter School will demonstrate proficiency in the social sciences.*

Outcome: Based on limited data, Grand Concourse met its social studies goal.

Analysis of Accountability Plan Measures:

Absolute Measure: <i>Each school year commencing in 2007-08, 75 percent of fifth grade students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science examination.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 (Tested: 21)
5	-	-	-	95.2
8	-	-	-	-

In 2007-2008, when Grand Course first took the state's 5th grade social studies exam, the school reported that 95 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level.

Comparative Measure: <i>Each school year commencing in 2007-08, the percent of fifth grade students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Social Studies exam will be greater than that of fifth grade students in local school district #9.</i>				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 (Grade 5)
School	-	-	-	95.2
District	-	-	-	-

Comparison data for the social studies exam are unavailable.

NCLB

In addition to meeting its specific subject area goals, the school is expected under No Child Left Behind to make adequate yearly progress towards enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state English language arts and mathematics exams. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues an annual school accountability report that indicates the school's status each year.

Accountability Plan Goal: *Each year the School will be deemed in 'good standing' by the state's accountability system.*

Outcome: The school met the goal. Grand Concourse Academy was deemed to be in good standing in each of the last four years of the charter period.

Absolute Measure: <i>Each year the School will be deemed in 'good standing' by the state's accountability system.</i>				
Status	Results			
	School Year			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Good Standing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Analysis of Additional Evidence

Grand Concourse Academy Charter School received a letter grade of "B" on its 2007-08 New York City Department of Education (DOE) Progress Report. According to the DOE, overall scores are based on school performance in three categories: School Environment, Student Performance and Student Progress, with the greatest emphasis placed on Student Progress. To provide a context for interpreting the DOE's evaluation of school performance, it considers schools that receive As and Bs to be eligible for rewards while schools that get Ds and Fs, or Cs over three years in a row, to face possible consequences. As a SUNY-authorized charter school, these criteria do not apply to Grand Concourse Academy.

Consistent with the data presented for the Accountability Plan measures in English language arts and mathematics above, Grand Concourse Academy received high marks in absolute student performance but performed less well in student growth. The school's lower overall score reflects the greater emphasis placed on its year-to-year progress over its absolute performance; namely, the decline in English language arts and mathematics proficiency rates from 2006-07 to 2007-08.