



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

Grand Concourse Academy Charter School

Third-Year Inspection Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The third-year inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for those charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. The inspection during the third year of a school's five-year charter cycle provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward the academic and, on a more limited basis, organizational Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a component of the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks ("Renewal Benchmarks").

The third-year inspection complements the regular reviews conducted by the SUNY Charter Schools Institute by incorporating the Institute's documentation of the school's previous record of performance. This report provides an analysis of the data reviewed before and during the inspection visit and reflects any trends evident therein. In addition, this assessment provides insights which may contribute to the school's ongoing improvement efforts and support the school's case when it applies for initial or subsequent charter renewal. Finally, the Institute uses third-year 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. School Progress Report: Part I and II**
- V. Overall Trends Regarding the School**

Section I - the "Introduction" provides an overview of the third year visit 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, 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 the site visit team's evidence and analysis of the school's effectiveness in meeting the standards set out in selected QEBs of the Renewal Benchmarks.

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 years as an indication of the school's academic success (Renewal Benchmark 1.A), 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 1.B – 1.F.

“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 2.B., 2.D.1, and 2.C.1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

In the final section of the Third-Year Visit report, Section V, “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 (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, and the Renewal Benchmarks, in their entirety, are included in Appendix B.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Grand Concourse Academy Charter School was conducted on March 22 and 23, 2007, by an independent team of experienced educators from Class Measures of Stoneham, Massachusetts. The team included:

Melanie Gallo is a former charter school founder and principal and has extensive classroom experience in urban school settings. Melanie has led charter school inspections in Massachusetts and in New York State. Melanie chaired the visit and authored the report.

Peter Davies is President of Class Measures. He is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He trains reviewers for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in Massachusetts.

Peter Clark is a former superintendent of schools and now a lead consultant in school review at Class Measures. He has conducted numerous reviews of all types of schools including charter schools since he joined the company two years ago. His special interests are in the curriculum and assessment.

Andrea DeMeo is a former elementary teacher with particular experience working with gifted and talented students in urban settings. Andrea is part of Class Measures' Teacher Quality team, and brings experience in observing instructional practice.

The team used QEBs, a subset of the 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* and reports from previous site visits by the Charter Schools Institute or other entities, such as the New York State Education Department. 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 Grand Concourse Academy Charter School ("Grand Concourse") on May 18, 2004, and it was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents in July of the 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 grades. The school added grade three in 2005-06 for a total enrollment of 234 students, and grade four in 2006-07 for a total enrollment of 285 students.

The mission statement for Grand Concourse 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 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.

Grand Concourse's academic program is built around the core subject areas and includes daily extended learning blocks for English language arts (ELA) (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 University Trustees: Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem, Merrick Academy in Queens, and Roosevelt Children's Academy on Long Island.

School Year

180 days

School Day

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

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment¹	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2004-05	175	175	181	K-2		K-2	YES
2005-06	225	225	234	K-3		K-3	YES
2006-07	275	275	285	K-4		K-4	YES
2007-08	275	330		K-5			
2008-09	275	335		K-5			

Race/Ethnicity	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	2	0.9%
Black (Not Hispanic)	114	63.0%	128	54.9%
Hispanic	65	35.9%	100	42.9%
White	2	1.1%	3	1.3%

Source: NYSED Report Card (2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

Free/Reduced Lunch	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	135	74.6%	188	80.7%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	31	13.3%	34	14.6%

Source: NYSED Report Card (2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

¹ 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.

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1st 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	

IV. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

Part 1: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success

A. School Performance Review

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY	Despite poor performance on its value added measures, the school is coming close to meeting both its ELA and math goals. The school has not yet had testing grades for science.
ELA	While the school did not meet its absolute measure for 2005-06 with 58 percent proficient on the state test, it did meet the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system. The school did outperform its district, but performed about the same as predicted in comparison to similar schools statewide. On its value added measure in 2005-06, none of the three grade level cohorts achieved their target on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and two cohorts remained below grade level.
Math	In absolute terms, 75 percent of students were proficient on the 2005-06 state test and the school easily met the AMO. The school outperformed the local school district, and in comparison to similar schools statewide it did far better than predicted. As with ELA, none of the three grade level cohorts met their targets on the ITBS, and all three finished the year below grade level.
Science	The school did not have a state testing grade in 2005-06. However, it did report results for end of year assessments on the McGraw Hill Science series. In terms of the percent passing, 89 percent of 1 st grade students, 72 percent of 2 nd grade students, and 84 percent of 3 rd grade students passed. However, it is impossible to draw conclusions from this since no information was provided about the alignment of this test with the state test.
Social Studies	Although the school does not have a social studies goal in its Accountability Plan, the percentage passing the McGraw Hill end of year assessment in 2005-06 for each grade ranged from 66 to 95 percent in grades K-3.
NCLB	The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.
Additional Goals (optional)	Respondents to the parent survey indicated high levels of satisfaction. The school met its target for student retention in 2005-06 with 91 percent of students returning in September and came close to its measure for student attendance with an average daily rate of 93 percent. The school also reports meeting its goals for organizational viability and fiscal soundness.

B. School Educational Program Review

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

Grand Concourse regularly administers assessments. The two external assessments used by the school are the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the New York State tests. The ITBS is given to all students in grades 1-4 each May; students entering the school for the first time and kindergarten students are tested in September, and the results are used as a baseline assessment of content knowledge and skill. The New York State ELA test is administered in January, the New York State mathematics test is administered in March, and the New York State science test is administered in May.

The school also uses several internal assessments. A bi-monthly assessment in reading and in mathematics created by the Assistant Principal is given to all students in grades K-4. Teachers reported to the team that they also administer English and mathematics unit tests designed and published by Scott Foresman; the content and skills tested are based on the school's curriculum pacing and lesson planning charts.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report found that similarly aligned assessments had not yet been developed in writing, social studies and science. Our team found that grade-level assessments, designed by the Principal and a curriculum committee, are now being given in social studies and in science twice a year. In addition, an appropriately aligned writing curriculum has now been developed; aligned rubrics are being used to assess writing. These rubrics were attached to student writing samples viewed by the team and posted with student work on the walls in classrooms and hallways where student writing was displayed.

Based on the team's review of approximately 200 samples of student work from a variety of subject areas and several teacher planbooks, the team found evidence that the work being assigned to students is aligned to the school's curricular scope and sequence and to state standards. Teachers interviewed by the team confirmed that they align their lesson plans with state standards. This alignment is also evidenced in classroom displays that cite either the standard itself or a student-friendly version in the form of the objective for the day.

Grand Concourse systematically collects and maintains all testing data in an assessment binder that the team reviewed. Testing data is also available to the teachers online. The team observed that bi-monthly data is posted on the walls of the administrative offices of the Assistant Principal and the Principal and that some teachers kept the assessments of their students in their planbooks. The team reviewed these color-coded charts of student performance.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report raised concerns regarding the reliability and validity of Grand Concourse's internal bi-monthly assessments, noting: "Based on the evidence, it does not appear that the school engages in a methodical process to determine the reliability or validity of a particular test item." The team found that Grand Concourse has not taken steps to improve the reliability and validity of its bi-monthly assessments. When questioned about this issue, the Principal and Assistant Principal stated that the internal assessments constitute an informal

internal tracking system that monitors the content and skills taught. Teachers and school administrators told the team that the internal assessments are effective in targeting the knowledge and skills that the students need in order to improve their academic performance. The team also saw evidence of the use of this assessment tool as a helpful formative assessment system extensively in use in the school. The team learned that the Assistant Principal in charge of creating and scoring the bi-monthly assessments is retiring at the end of the year and that, with his retirement, these services will disappear. The school has consequently contracted with Edusoft to develop a replacement assessment program whose reliability and validity will be assured.

The school uses assessment data to determine whether its Accountability Plan goals are being met. The team reviewed a February 15, 2007, document entitled "School Performance Review" that was prepared by the Charter Schools Institute and provided to the Board; this document evaluated the school's assessment data relative to the school's Accountability Plan.

The team found evidence that the Grand Concourse's leadership uses assessment data to monitor and make improvements in instruction and learning. The 2005-2006 Evaluation Report noted that the school primarily used assessment data generated by the school's internal assessment system to identify students in need of remediation in a particular skill or core subject area as well as students benefiting from Title I services. Remediation continues to be the primary focus of the school's use of assessment data.

The Assistant Principal analyzes the student responses on the bi-monthly assessments and provides them to teachers in the form of color-coded charts. According to the Assistant Principal, these assessments serve as the driving force behind instruction: he not only reviews this data to see how well students are learning but also reviews data to get a better understanding of instructional effectiveness and shares this information with teachers. This information helps teachers target reteaching areas as well as areas in which the staff might need professional development support. For example, teachers were given a workshop by Scott Foresman on how to teach a skill pre-March and post-March for better results on the New York State mathematics test administered in March.

In addition, the Principal reported to the team that a major school decision was made in response to assessment data: the creation in the middle of 2005-2006 school year of an additional section of students combining six students from grade 2 and four students from grade 3 who were having particular issues with comprehension. Three of these students were moved back to their grade levels at the end of the year. Similarly, last year a combined grade 3 and grade 4 group of the lowest-performing students worked with a highly skilled reading specialist. The decision not to promote these students was based on skill attainment data generated by school assessments.

Teachers analyze the assessment data for use in creating flexible groupings, as the 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report found, but they also reported using the data to target challenge areas. For example, the kindergarten teacher uses reading assessment results to choose appropriate and differentiated reading level books for the individual reading texts assigned to students in the classroom. The students observed by the team in their classrooms had books at their seats designed to challenge them at skill level. Another student was observed leaving the kindergarten

so that she could have her reading lesson in the first grade. Teachers' efforts at reteaching a skill were also reflected in the lesson planbooks that the team saw and in classroom observations of the lessons being taught.

One teacher interviewed reported that mathematics assessments had shown that his students were having considerable trouble in the areas of money, telling time and problem solving. This information led him to use manipulatives more extensively. He set up role-play situations with money where one student was the cashier and another student the customer. He also had students make their own clock faces. Another teacher reported that he reviews scores to see which students understand the material and which ones are not having success. He then adjusts his teaching plan, and uses the Assisted Instruction Time and the after school program for re-teaching. He also communicates this information with parents. If re-teaching a skill is necessary, he mixes and matches a variety of additional resources that supplement his text materials.

Teachers are expected to keep log sheets that indicate which students have mastered objectives taught on a particular day in a particular unit and which students need reteaching. However, although these were mentioned by both teachers and administrators, the team did not see evidence of widespread use of these log sheets. The Principal told the team that the log sheet process is not closely monitored.

Nevertheless, the team believes that there is evidence indicating that the teachers are using the data to make changes and improvements in their curriculum and in their instruction. In interviews, Grand Concourse administrators and teachers shared a common understanding of the importance of assessments and their responsibility to improve student achievement; Grand Concourse is unequivocal in holding teachers accountable for student learning. Teachers who do not enable improved student achievement are not to be rehired, according to Board members and administrators interviewed by the team.

One of the instruments for evaluating teachers is a form entitled "Evaluating Student Work" and focuses on assessment procedures. The school regularly communicates assessment outcomes to parents. Parents interviewed by the team said that they receive the results of the bi-monthly assessments and, if their performance falls below proficiency levels during any assessment period, they are given skill practice sheets for their children to work on at home. This testing schedule is referenced in the school's Parent Manual.

The Board also receives written updates of the testing data and the team was given a copy of the most recent board document. The Board members interviewed reported using assessment information to make decisions about student learning, for example in grade restructuring decisions.

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

Grand Concourse has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum that it uses to prepare students to meet the state standards. The school's Reading /ELA text is published by Scott Foresman and is the New York Edition. Mathematics texts are also the Scott Foresman New York Edition. Both include testing and review books geared to the state tests. The school also uses Everyday Math by McMillan/McGraw Hill.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report found that that the school's curricula in writing, social studies, and science were not as fully developed as those in reading and writing. The team found that the writing program has since been further developed and aligned to meet state standards program. Grand Concourse uses the Zaner-Bloser Strategies for Writers in the K-4 grades. The team observed that the writing standards were clearly posted in classrooms next to the student work on display. The team also observed student writing posted in the hallways of the school. These student writing samples contained solid evidence of writing across the subject areas and reflected writing for different purposes. Students interviewed said that they liked writing and enjoyed journaling. This evidence indicates to the team that writing is now a focus at Grand Concourse Academy.

The team found that the school is continuing the work of developing and aligning its social studies and science curricula. The school's social studies texts are published by McMillan/McGraw Hill; its science texts are published by McMillan/McGraw Hill with additional classroom materials from the Scott Foresman Hands-on Science Kits. Summer curriculum work by a teacher committee focused on aligning the science curriculum and further developing the pacing charts. Teachers interviewed by the team reported that they were pleased with the school's progress in this area.

Grand Concourse also provides art instruction in relation to other core areas, taught by the classroom teacher. Physical education usually takes place on the playground after lunch.

In the current school year, Grand Concourse opened a school library that contains interesting new books, a listening station and computers. Each class has scheduled time to use the library, and the after-school program also uses the library for enrichment purposes.

Based on the team's observations and interviews, teachers appear to be fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible. Each grade level has its own pacing charts as well as scope and sequence charts. The charts, which are kept in grade-level notebooks that were reviewed by the team, progress from grade level to grade level. Teachers interviewed by the team stated that they have access to the pacing charts, the scope and sequence charts, and the aligned textbook materials and that all of these materials are valuable resources in planning their curriculum. Teachers also stated that they develop their lesson plans in alignment with the state standards using the pacing charts, the scope and sequence documents, and the aligned textbook materials. Teachers whose classrooms were observed by the team were able to clearly articulate the standards addressed by the lesson they had taught. The teacher planbooks that the team looked at confirmed the use of state standards in lesson planning.

The curriculum documents reviewed by the team indicated that the curriculum is organized from grade to grade. In interviews with the team, teachers referred to the skills and knowledge needed for each grade and to their responsibility in ensuring that their students were ready for the academic challenges in the next grade.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report recommended that Grand Concourse consider the sustainability of its approach to curriculum development, the responsibility for which was assigned to the school's Director of Instruction. In response to this recommendation, the school has formed an informal curriculum committee; in addition, grade-level work on curriculum during time mandated for professional development has brought teachers into the curriculum development process. In these respects, the school has begun to address the sustainability issue.

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

There is evidence that a strong instructional leadership team is in place at Grand Concourse. The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report noted that the Principal and Assistant Principal brought solid educational experience, knowledge and skill to their work but that there was a need to broaden instructional leadership. Since then, the school has added a second Assistant Principal. The new Assistant Principal is a Grand Concourse founder who previously served on the Board of Trustees. The constitution of the current team is designed to support the effective delivery of instruction. One Assistant Principal focuses on creating and evaluating the bi-monthly assessments, and interpreting and sharing the feedback from the assessment data with teachers so that they may improve instruction and curriculum development. The other Assistant Principal focuses on staff development programming; twenty five percent of her time is devoted solely to professional development for staff. All three members of the team participate in evaluations of teaching staff. Teachers state that these three leaders are supportive of their efforts and available to them as an instructional leadership resource. In particular, the value of having an Assistant Principal focused on professional development and who models instruction as well as provides direct coaching was referred to by several teachers.

The overarching instructional priority established by the leadership team in the school's staff handbook is to promote the academic success of all students at the school. Grand Concourse has established a number of programs to help all children reach the academic goals listed in the school's Accountability Plan. The school employs and uses the data from both internal and external assessment to improve student learning and instruction. The school uses Special Education and Title 1 teachers and resources to help students requiring additional support. Classroom assistants are deployed to facilitate groupings and small group instruction. The school offers after-school help and tutoring.

The team's interviews with teachers confirmed that the teachers understand that, with administrative support, they are responsible for ensuring the academic success of each of the students they teach. The attention given by teachers and administrators to the bi-monthly testing data and to other assessments is further evidence that teachers and administrators are aware of the academic needs of students and are making a concerted effort to improve their skills and, accordingly, to meet the academic goals listed in the Accountability Plan.

The team found that school leadership has in place a comprehensive and ongoing system for evaluating teachers. Teacher evaluations are conducted using three different evaluation instruments. Walkthroughs (also called Learning Walks) are focused in four different areas: Instructional Environment, Planning for Instruction, Displaying Student Work, and Evaluating Student Work. Performance Review Check Sheets are used to evaluate assistant teachers. Narrative Write-ups focus on the quality of classroom instruction and how to improve it. Teachers interviewed reported having been evaluated using these three instruments and stated that the leadership team had given them specific and helpful feedback. The team reviewed the evaluations of several teachers, and found evidence of the reported procedures. During the team's visit, administrators were observed conducting evaluations and Learning Walks in classrooms.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report raised concerns regarding the inadequacy of Grand Concourse's professional development efforts and the support given to teachers to develop their pedagogical skills. The team found that the school's leadership has addressed this criticism by adding the additional Assistant Principal, whose focus is professional development; by adding summer opportunities for curriculum development; by using Monday afternoons for whole faculty professional work; and by adding an additional nine days during the year allocated to professional growth. The school's leadership has also created new opportunities for teachers to attend workshops they request outside of school.

According to the school's leadership and Board members interviewed by the team, the school's staffing decisions are based on its evaluation system. Board members told the team that teachers who do not perform according to expectations are not rehired. The school's method of recruiting teachers is informal: the Principal attends educational job fairs, minority recruitment job fairs and goes to Teach for America program looking for quality staff. The Principal also told the team that he uses his considerable educational network to seek the people he needs; he said that this year he was pleased to have recruited both a mentor teacher from the Teach for America program and one of Florida's Teachers of the Year.

The team found evidence that the school's leadership has established an environment of high expectations. The school environment, as observed by the visiting team, promotes learning. Teachers expressed to the team their understanding of their responsibility to promote student achievement. Parents told the team that Grand Concourse is a serious school where children are expected to succeed. The student work samples reviewed by the team indicate an emphasis on hard work and revision.

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

The team visited eight (out of 11 total) classrooms during the site visit. The classrooms observed included one kindergarten class, two first grade classes, two second grade classes, two third grade classes, and one fourth grade class. The lesson observations each lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. Three classrooms had two teachers providing instruction; five had one teacher. The team assessed the quality of instruction directly in relation to the six instructional indicators under Benchmark 1D2 (NY-CSI; Protocol 2007). The classroom

observations were followed by individual interviews between the observers and the teachers observed.

All teachers observed by the team demonstrated competency in the subject matter taught. There was clear evidence in the classrooms observed of a standards-based curriculum linked to the state performance standards. The team found that the lessons observed on the day of the visit were focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards. All but one classroom had the objectives for the day posted. Teachers in several classrooms repeated the objectives of the day for their students; however, in one classroom, one student group was given the objective but the second was not. The teachers observed demonstrated an understanding of the current knowledge and skill level of their students, and students who were struggling with the lesson received direct attention. One lesson observation on writing demonstrated a good use of graphic organizers to help students in their writing process. The teacher also adapted the assignment to meet individual student needs. The team observed another lesson that focused on biography but the teaching also included developing fluency and vocabulary, using context clues, summarizing and writing skills. A third grade mathematics lesson observation involved using mathematics terms such as estimation, observation, inquiry and hypothesis. Students were encouraged to write or draw in their mathematics journals to explain the process involved in solving the assigned problems.

In follow-up interviews, teachers were able to state the specific performance standard that they were working on in the lesson observed and gave examples of how the learning needs of individual students were being met during the observed lesson. Teachers also explained how they use the bi-monthly assessments to create student groupings as well as to develop challenge opportunities.

All classrooms visited had displays on the walls that were appropriate for subject area and grade levels. For example, the kindergarten had alphabet and color charts as well as calendar and time displays. Student work was prominent in all classrooms visited. It was also posted on hallway walls throughout the school.

The team observed that, in five out of the eight classrooms observed, not all students were engaged in focused purposeful activities: 10 percent to 30 percent of the students in these classrooms were not engaged in their lessons at any one time. The lack of engagement observed by the team was not consistent within a class: in some cases, one group of students was fully engaged, and the other was not. (While most of the classrooms observed had two student groups at work, one had three groups). When students were not paying attention, six of the teachers observed redirected them and helped them get back on task; however, two teachers made no attempt at redirection. An example of this was a well-constructed lesson on possessive pronouns that presented a variety of learning opportunities activities. Program materials were prepared on newsprint sheets with good visuals and good examples. Students, however, were not attentive.

The classrooms seemed quite crowded to the visiting team, especially those classrooms in which students tried to work in groups taught by two teachers. The team felt that where space was very limited this impacted negatively on student engagement. When asked if the groupings made it difficult to concentrate, students said that their teachers played soft music, either classical or jazz, which allowed them to concentrate on the music rather than on the noise from the other

group of students. Teachers interviewed by the team said that they were focused on their own lessons and did not hear the other professional in the room.

Classroom space also has an impact on how student groupings can be configured. One teacher in a class with two groupings taught the whole lesson while at least six students had their backs to her. Although some teachers indicated to the team that they could move out of their rooms when particular activities necessitated it, others said that it was not possible to do so because of scheduling. Teachers stated that they had received professional development in the use of learning centers and a number of them indicated that they use centers particularly in science. The teachers said that, because of spacing issues, these could not remain set up in classrooms but had to be portable.

In all but one of the eight classes observed, instruction was delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson. The classrooms observed by the team were primarily teacher-centered. The expectations for what students need to know were clearly articulated in seven classrooms. In these classrooms, teachers made reference to lessons that had come before so that students might understand how they were building knowledge.

In all but one of the eight classrooms observed by the team, the use of instructional time was maximized, and transitions were handled with routine expectations. In one classroom, transitions were slow and the lesson lacked good pacing. Students interviewed by the team said that they had jobs to get materials and to put them away. Students also had time limits so this could be managed efficiently. The team also noted that teachers made reference to continuity of learning in statements to students such as, "Yesterday we did this," or "Remember last week when we studied that."

In two of the eight classrooms observed by the team, teachers made a habit of asking challenging questions; in most classrooms observed, teachers were beginning to use the instructional focus of Accountable Talk, a practice designed to help students develop higher-order thinking skills. Accountable Talk asks students to use complete sentences when responding, to cite evidence for their responses, and to elaborate on each other's responses. It also allows them to identify another student to answer in their stead, if they need help. This new pedagogic strategy, in which all teachers are receiving continuing professional development, was introduced in September, 2006. The team observed some examples where the Accountable Talk strategy was being used to good effect, but also noted that in other instances it seemed to slow down the pacing and create significant lag time. Both teachers and administrators told the team that they believed this drawback would ameliorate as students become more skillful in the technique.

The main provision for special learning needs in the classes observed was use of two groups working with two teachers. The team also noted withdrawal for students with special needs.

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

Grand Concourse deploys a range of staff resources to help students requiring additional academic supports. A Special Education/Title I Coordinator administers the program about half-time and also provides intervention teaching about half-time. The Coordinator is certified in Special Education and works directly with a number of the students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) Guidelines. The school also employs four teacher assistants, one associate teacher, and one full-time equivalent position termed "academic intervention support teacher" that is filled by two people. These seven people provide additional help in classrooms during the ELA and mathematics blocks as well as intervention services for students withdrawn from classes during the academic intervention period. One full-time teacher assistant works one-on-one with a particular student, in accordance with the student's IEP requirements. There is one part-time English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who serves six to eight kindergarten students. The school also contracts on a per diem basis for speech and language assistance to students for the equivalent of one day a week.

Grand Concourse has 13 students with IEPs: 10 requiring speech and language support, one requiring support for a learning disability, one with visual impairment, and one with other impairments. It was reported that typically students with severe disabilities would not remain at the school but would use specialized programs at other settings.

The Coordinator assigns students among the seven support staff with ratios of no greater than four to one. She stated that she would like to have additional staffing to include a somewhat larger number of students. There are currently 61 students who receive Title 1 support; the school had 73 eligible students in the fall, and there have been as many as 85 eligible students at times over the past three years. The Coordinator does not have direct involvement with the Title I budget, which is handled by Victory Schools, Inc., the school's management company with which it has a limited services contract. The Coordinator indicated that she had ample supplies of instructional materials and resources.

Grand Concourse's policy is to provide all special education services within a full-inclusion setting. The Coordinator works with seven of the students with IEP in regular education classrooms every day for approximately forty minutes. She did also report withdrawing students from their classrooms for further reinforcement on a regular basis, a practice that does not conform fully to the full-inclusion policy.

The school uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) as a screening instrument to determine which students may need additional academic support through Title 1 services. The ITBS is given to all students in May and to kindergarten and newly enrolled students in September. Students who score one year or more below grade level are then given the Peabody Individual Achievement Test to confirm achievement level. Students who are "on the cusp," as described by one teacher, could then be considered for teacher referral for evaluation by the Committee on Special Education to determine whether the students are in need of special education services or programs. Similarly, in the middle of the year, based on the school's bi-monthly assessment system and also by teacher grading at report times, students may be referred by individual teacher recommendation.

If a student is considered eligible for special education, the school sends home a parent notification and approval letter. According to administration, no parent has ever denied permission for eligibility. Approval letters are kept on file at the school.

Screening of students for special education is preceded by a protocol that involves informal teacher discussion with parents, with administration, and then more formally through the Pupil Personnel Committee (PPC) that meets monthly to draw together the Coordinator, administration, and the teacher. At those meetings, the number of students in need of services is identified. Issues are defined, prior intervention efforts are reviewed, and new intervention strategies are developed. These are tried for at least one month and then reassessed. If special needs services are considered necessary, the student is referred to the Committee on Special Education (CSE). The CSE is responsible for all evaluations and for chairing the IEP meeting with the parent and other appropriate personnel. The Coordinator participates in such meetings, as do teachers and administrators along with other specialists as needed.

The Coordinator works within the goals of each student's IEP to generate all of the materials from textbooks, other text resources, or the Internet. The Coordinator also oversees the work of academic intervention support teachers. She bases her assignment of work on assessment sheets that are turned in by classroom teachers every two weeks. These identify areas of weakness to be reinforced and the areas of the curriculum being covered with students as defined by pacing charts in reading and math.

The team's interviews with teachers revealed a common understanding of the eligibility criteria, intervention procedures, and services available to students at risk of academic failure. The teachers have had professional development training in this area, as indicated on the professional development meeting agenda reviewed by the team, and confirmed by teachers in interview. The team also reviewed teacher recommendations for Title I services as indicated by the ITBS and the current internal assessments and the current schedules for services in ELA and mathematics. The new Assistant Principal has recently taken over chairing of the PPC from the Principal.

As noted above, the structuring of Title I intervention time is coordinated with the regular daily schedule, and the assessment sheets provide guidance for the support teachers. The school's use of academic intervention adults in classrooms in the morning and with students withdrawn in the afternoon, along with the small size of the school, allows informal teacher dialogue about students, as well. The school's bi-monthly assessment system provides a common tool used by classroom and by intervention staff to evaluate student success on skills and sub-skills.

Grand Concourse monitors student performance informally through teacher reactions to the progress of individual students and in a more structured way using the bi-monthly tests of the school. Students receiving the upper two levels of achievement on the bi-monthly tests, level 3 or level 4, are considered to be achieving at a satisfactory level and no longer eligible for Title I support.

Progress reports for students receiving services go home with report cards in November, March, and June, which are also the points of review for students exiting or remaining in the program based on the bi-monthly school tests and teacher grading of achievement. The team reviewed

progress reports. Exit from Special Education is controlled by the CSE after appropriate IEP reviews and meetings.

It is evident to the team through the documents reviewed and through interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to support students who require additional academic supports. It is also clear that significant resources have been invested to address the needs of this student population. However, since the academic goals stated in the school's Accountability Plan have not been met in ELA, the effectiveness of these academic support services has not yet been fully demonstrated.

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

The team observed that Grand Concourse is an orderly school that promotes a culture of learning. The school has a documented discipline policy that encourages mutual respect and cooperation and emphasizes, "students are responsible for their choices and the consequences of their behavior." The discipline policy is designed to help students understand this aspect of community living. Teachers are required to submit a discipline plan to the Principal in September for approval. The plan must include class rules, consequences and incentives and must reflect student input.

In each classroom visited by the team, the rules of the classroom were on bulletin boards. One example of a classroom intervention observed in classroom visits was the color-coded card system: when a child is given a warning, he or she is asked to turn the card to the color indicating misbehavior. In student interviews, the students were generally in agreement that the rules made it easier to get along in the school and made them focus on their behavior. They reported that different teachers had different kinds of procedures for assuring good discipline but that they all worked with incentives for good behavior and demerits for bad behavior.

As previously noted, the level of student engagement in the classrooms visited by the team varied. The team observed that low-level chatter was permitted in some classrooms. Overall, student behavior in classrooms was good. Students were also observed moving about the school in a safe and orderly fashion.

Teachers and some teaching assistants have been trained in Responsive Classroom techniques. In addition to being a classroom management approach, Responsive Classroom has, at its core, the belief that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum and that process and content are integral to one another. Some Responsive Classroom practices include morning meeting, rules with logical consequences, and classroom organization of materials and routines that promote caring. The team observed some of these practices, such as hands held up and counting to five, which are methods of asking for the attention and quiet of the group. Time for morning meeting was indicated in the teacher lesson planbooks reviewed by the team. Students told the team that they used the practice of counting to five to give everyone a chance to finish what they were saying. Students interviewed stated that their classrooms had procedures in place for getting materials and returning things. The efficiency and orderliness of these routines was observed by the team in the classrooms visited. Several teachers and the Assistant Principal who had not been trained in Responsive Classroom were reportedly going to be trained in the coming months.

The Grand Concourse charter cited school uniforms as a design element. The team observed only two students who were not wearing uniforms during the team's visit. When asked about the students who were not in uniform, teachers were able to explain to the team why each student was not appropriately dressed, and the steps being taken to support the families in remedying the situation. In the opinion of the team, the uniform seems to contribute to the sense of order at Grand Concourse.

In interviews with the team, parents reported that the school was a safe place: the doors were locked, security was solid, and there was a sign-in procedure for visitors and parents. They stated that there was always a member of the school's staff monitoring the front door and that the parents were known by school staff. During the visit, the team observed that these security procedures were in place as described by the parents. Parents also told the team that they felt comfortable when they dropped their children off in the morning. They reported that poor behavior was dealt with effectively and that student discipline was not an issue. One parent said that a teacher had been in touch with her regarding her 'chatty' daughter and they had worked together to resolve the problem. Others reported that one teacher sent home discipline reports every Wednesday.

Parents told the team that they were pleased that Grand Concourse was a serious place where work was required of their children. They stated that their children were learning not to be boisterous, but rather to be independent and compassionate and to care about the other students in their classes. In interviews with the team, teachers discussed the sense of family that they were trying to create by helping students to learn to get along with others in spite of differences. Several teachers spoke about having their students apologize and work out their problems. Students reported that they had class meetings to discuss being kind to each other, as well as living by the Golden Rule (*treat others as you would like to be treated*). Some mentioned writing prompts dealing with this topic. One student, echoed by others in a focus group, stated that the school was a 'tremendous' school and that she liked being in 'a quiet school'. One teacher interviewed said that when she had initially visited the school as a prospective teaching candidate, the sense of safety and orderliness she felt in the school made her want to come to teach there.

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

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report determined that Grand Concourse's professional development initiatives were insufficient to address the significant instructional challenges facing the school and that the school's professional development plan did not provide adequate levels of support to teachers in meeting the school's high levels of accountability. The team found that the school has responded to the concerns raised in the 2005-2006 Evaluation Report by creating a comprehensive and supportive professional development plan. This includes nine full-day professional development workshops (see below for examples), mandatory pre-service training for five days (held prior to the opening of school in the fall of 2006), and monthly mandated professional development workshops after-school on Mondays.

The Grand Concourse's 2006-2007 staff handbook also emphasizes that professional development at the school is an integral part of supporting teachers' growth with a strong emphasis on content knowledge acquisition and effective process strategies. The handbook further states that the school's professional development activities are designed to meet the needs of a diverse teaching staff. The program is intended to increase teachers' pedagogical skills while offering classroom-based support through modeling, demonstrations and feedback. Teachers affirmed that this support has been made available throughout the year from the literacy coach, the math consultant and the Assistant Principal during teacher preparation periods, and by providing internal cover.

The overview of the school's professional development plan provided in the school's 2006-2007 staff handbook lists eleven top priorities for the 2006 -2007 school year as well as four areas of focus and eight professional development goals. By reviewing the plan and interviewing teachers, the team concluded that the professional development currently being undertaken dovetails with the school's curriculum and instructional strategy and reflects the needs of the teaching staff. While acknowledging the significant amount of professional development work to do in any startup organization, the team noted that teachers were neither all yet trained in the four areas of focus nor were all of the teachers who had been trained able to successfully implement the practices in their classrooms. For example, in the classrooms observed, teachers demonstrated varying degrees of understanding how to use Responsive Classroom practices. Similarly, the Accountable Talk instructional practices are in various stages of use in the classrooms observed.

The school has based its professional development program on identified instructional weaknesses, teacher interests, and analyses of student outcomes. For example, the school scheduled seven professional development training sessions with trainers from Riverside Publishers to address the following: NYS performance standards, NYS assessments and the development of teacher made/skills-based materials/ activities that are aligned with the NYS exams. Other workshops have focused on technology, the Zaner Bloser writing process, and Accountable Talk. Stipends were made available during the last summer recess to enable teachers to meet and to work from home to continue the development of pacing charts and curriculum alignment in science. Priority goals of particular focus for new teachers are behavior management, working with parents and time management.

Teachers interviewed by the team confirmed that the school's professional development program has improved radically since the second-year visit that was the basis for the 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report. They said that the school's administration is responsive to requests for professional development in any area needed. They feel that with the mandatory Monday professional development sessions, monthly, the additional full-day workshops, and the new Assistant Principal's support, their professional needs are now being adequately provided for. The voluntary lunch meetings that the 2005-2006 Evaluation Report deemed inadequate are still taking place once or twice a month; however, they are supplemented by the many other professional development opportunities cited above. Teachers stated that as long as the lunch meetings helped them become better teachers, they were happy to attend them.

The professional development plan lists seven ways in which the impact of the plan on student achievement will be evaluated. They are: (i) staff will continue the work started last year to create effective rubrics for student performance assessment; (ii) one year's growth will be shown for each regular education student on the ITBS; (iii) achievement will be seventy-five per cent or better on the 4th grade ELA and mathematics state tests; (iv) by bi-monthly intervention reports regarding children most at risk; (v) by grade level meetings working as a whole to make sure that all children are assisted in the ways needed to succeed; (vi) by bi-monthly assessments in reading and mathematics and content area assessments. These tests will be performed a minimum of three times per year in grades K-4; and (vii) by reviewing student writing at grade level and across grade levels. Since it is only the first year of the plan, the year is not complete, and since some of the testing that will serve as indications of success has not yet taken place, the effectiveness of the program cannot yet be evaluated. However, the team can state that the school has begun to address the professional development concerns raised in the 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report, and that teachers are now optimistic about the opportunities for professional development.

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

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

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

The team found evidence that Grand Concourse is faithful to its mission, which is as follows:

The mission of the Grand Concourse Academy Public 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 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.

The team also found evidence that the school has implemented some of the following key design elements included in Grand Concourse's charter:

- Standards-based, back to basics educational program;
- Student-centered attention;
- Extended school day;
- High academic standards;
- Professional development opportunities for teachers;
- Innovative teaching methods;
- School uniform; and
- Performance-based accountability.

Through interviews with focus groups of parents, students, teachers, administrators and three members of the Board of Directors as well as in individual interviews with administrators and teachers, the team learned that these stakeholders are aware of and can articulate the school's mission and key charter design elements. Parents told the team that they felt the school was student-centered and that school staff worked hard to ensure that their children were successful and challenged. They said that they believe that their children are learning to be independent and to take responsibility for their actions. Several parents gave specific examples of their children's character development. Students told the team that they were learning to treat each other well using the Golden Rule.

Grand Concourse Academy's mission statement states, in part: "The Academy will place a strong emphasis on music, math, science, and foreign language." The team found evidence that the school's music and foreign language programs have not yet been developed to the extent anticipated in the school's charter. The school uses a music text by Scott Foresman entitled, *Making Music* to teach music in conjunction with other curriculum topics. A non-certified, very experienced music teacher provides an after-school choral music enrichment program during recess and accompanies classroom productions. The school is reportedly planning to construct a music/art room for the 2007/2008 school year.

In the area of foreign language, one Spanish as a Second Language teacher provides Spanish instruction one day a week in each classroom. There is also a non-certified associate teacher who augments this instruction in the third and fourth grade classrooms by an additional day each week. In an interview with the team, Board members stated that they intend to review the school's music and foreign language programs in the coming year.

Grand Concourse teachers confirmed that the school's curriculum is driven by the charter. One teacher summarized the importance of the school's back-to-basics curriculum by saying that, if students were missing the basic material, they would be unable to build on this material in order

to achieve higher-order thinking. Teachers also spoke passionately about their responsibility to help their students be challenged and achieve. They told the team that they had high expectations for their students and an obligation to help them be emotionally safe. They said that the small size of the school helps them know and meet the needs of their students. Teachers also spoke about the problem-solving techniques that they used to help children resolve differences.

Documents reviewed by the team as well as interviews with stakeholders confirmed that Grand Concourse has created a back-to-basics educational program and that there is performance-based accountability for this program. The team also confirmed that the school day is extended until 4 p.m. and that students wear uniforms. As previously discussed, the school has created a professional development plan that expands the available professional development opportunities for teacher growth.

The team did not find evidence of significant involvement of community organizations or community leaders to enhance individual academic success.

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

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

Parents and students interviewed by the team expressed strong support for their school. Both groups are pleased that they are connected to this school. Although the group of parents interviewed numbered only five, they told the team that they felt that they represented the feelings of most parents at the school. Two of them had been at the school since it started, and two were new to the school this year. They expressed strong positive attitudes about the education provided to their children; several parents discussed the school's challenging curriculum and effective teachers. Parents said that they were satisfied that their children have plenty of homework. Parents also praised the help that their children receive when needed, and one parent cited the Title I help her child received. According to the parents, their children love coming to school and love the work that they do at the school. They stated that Grand Concourse is a school that makes their children want to learn.

Parents also expressed satisfaction with the school's strong communications with and responsiveness to parents. They told the team that they feel welcome in the school and its classrooms, and that the school responds to their calls within 24 hours.

Grand Concourse administers annual parent surveys that request parents to respond anonymously to a number of questions regarding the school's academic program, their child's academic progress, and their overall satisfaction with the education provided by Grand Concourse. The 2005-2006 survey was sent to 232 families; the school received 202 responses, some of which were multiple responses from families with more than one child in the school. The surveys are received by Grand Concourse and tallied by Victory. The team had access to the individual survey that parents filled out in 2005 – 2006 and noted that 99% of parents were either satisfied or very satisfied in all areas.

According to the Board members and administrators interviewed by the team, Grand Concourse has a waiting list of 750 students. The size of the waiting list attests to the demand for places at Grand Concourse.

The team interviewed a group of eight third and fourth grade students. These students told the team that Grand Concourse is a 'tremendous' school that provides them with 'great' learning experiences. They said that their teachers were helpful. They also said that the teachers get them well-prepared for tests and allay their test anxieties. They said that they liked being in a quiet school where the Principal was 'nice'. These views are borne out by Grand Concourse meeting its Accountability Plan goal of 90% of students enrolled returning the next year.

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

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

The team interviewed three of the six members of Grand Concourse's Board of Trustees. The board meets ten times per year in public session; the board does not have subcommittees. The board meeting minutes were made available to the team. The board members present at the interview stated that the key to the school's mission is "academic excellence in a safe environment." They believe that Grand Concourse provides its students with a solid foundation as well as academic challenges.

The team confirmed that the board receives written academic updates and written summaries of the school's testing results. One board member present at the interview shared the documents that the board had received at a recent meeting, which included this summary.

The board members interviewed by the team understood their role as requiring oversight, policy making, and monitoring. One example of policy making cited by the board members entailed a decision as to whether to retain and create a bridging class for a certain group of students or to socially promote them. The board ultimately determined that the students needed more time to improve and accepted the school leader's recommendation to create a class for the affected students. Those present stated that it is also their job to ensure that the school meets its legal obligations.

The 2005-2006 School Evaluation Report found that the board had not yet conducted a formal evaluation of the Principal. The team learned, at the time of the evaluation visit, that the board still had not done so. In the interview with the team, board members stated that they had conducted an informal review of the Principal's performance last year and had recently received help from the Center for Charter School Excellence in securing an appropriate instrument to be used in conducting a formal evaluation. They plan to complete a written evaluation of the Principal this year.

The board has not yet prepared a strategic plan. Board members told the team that facilities have been the longest ongoing issue for the board. They have recently focused on adding a fifth grade

and finding space to house the additional students. Those interviewed told the team that they have been “goal-focused” and believe that they are now in a position to prepare a strategic plan. They noted that Grand Concourse still has a limited services contract with Victory and still plans to phase out those services. They said that they are creating a transition document for the phase-out of the Victory contract to minimize the impact of the transition on the school. According to those interviewed, the phase-out will not take place this year because of the need to focus on the addition of a fifth grade. The board members also articulated the goal of revisiting the charter and reviewing the school’s commitment to music and foreign language programs.

The board members interviewed by the team noted that they need to recruit new members, and cited the difficulty of recruiting committed people. They indicated that board replenishment is one of their goals.

V. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

The team found evidence that Grand Concourse has in place a curriculum for mathematics, English Language Arts and writing that is aligned with state performance standards. Scope and sequence charts and pacing charts are available in these areas as well. The school is currently working on science and social studies alignment as well as scope and sequencing charts and pacing charts.

Overall, there is also evidence of strong instructional leadership at Grand Concourse, based on the Institute’s Renewal Benchmarks. The school’s leadership team has established a culture of high academic and behavioral expectations that are 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 appears to be a comprehensive system in place for teacher evaluations that provides direct feedback to teachers that they find constructive and supportive.

Grand Concourse has a system to gather assessment data constructed by an Assistant Principal, administered by teaching staff and analyzed by teaching staff with the Assistant Principal. The school is using this system of bi-monthly tests well to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The issue of these internal bi-monthly assessments lacking reliability and validity was raised in the last site visit report. Though this is still an issue, the school is aware of it and has purchased an EduSoft program in 2006 that was being used alongside tests constructed by the Assistant Principal at the time of the visit.

The school culture allows and promotes learning through clear and effective discipline policies and procedures. Throughout the school a safe and orderly environment is evident.

Professional development appears to have improved at Grand Concourse, with evidence of more resources deployed in this area. The school administration is committed to continue in its efforts to help all teachers reach a consistent high level of pedagogical skill.

Organizational Viability

The school has been faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements in its charter. The stakeholders interviewed understand the mission and are aware of the design elements in place to carry out the mission. Although the design elements that indicate an emphasis on music and foreign language are not as fully developed as the Charter had envisioned, the Board of Trustees is aware of this and is committed to reviewing the provision next year.

The Board of Trustees appears to have worked effectively to achieve the mission and goals of Grand Concourse. They have grown the school to meet the demand for its services by adding a fifth grade. They have sought and secured an appropriate space for that growth to take place. They have taken effective action to correct the deficiencies in academic performance by not accepting social promotion and have added mixed grade level classes to meet the varying needs of students who have not attained proficiency in meeting performance standards. As a group, they have recognized the need for objectivity in reviewing testing data and have hired an outside expert to report to them in that area.

The Board of Directors has not yet conducted a formal evaluation of the Principal, but in interviews they stated their intention to do so.

In the next two years Grand Concourse Academy faces the challenges of transitioning from the degree of external management provided by Victory, preparing for and embedding a new internal assessment program and establishing the new 5th grade in a different building. The strategy and resolve of the Board of Trustees and school leadership will be important during the period ahead.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

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

APPENDIX B

**Charter Renewal
Benchmarks**

Version 3.2

June 2006

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An Introduction to the Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmarks serve primarily two functions at renewal:

- They provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute to gather evidence to determine whether a school has made an adequate case for renewal. In turn, this evidence permits the Institute to decide if it can make the ultimate legal and other findings it is required to make in order to reach a positive recommendation for renewal. Thus, for instance, the various benchmarks that the Institute uses to determine whether the school has had in place fiscally responsible practices during the last charter period allow the Institute to determine with greater accuracy whether the school will be operated in a fiscally sound manner during the next charter period, a finding that the Institute is legally required to make.
- At the same time that the Renewal Benchmarks provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute to gather evidence, they also provide the school with a guide to what the Institute is looking for. By giving details to a school, a school has a better sense of what is expected when it comes to renewal. Of course, as the Institute uses the Renewal Benchmarks (or some sub-set of them) during its annual evaluation visits to schools, no school should be surprised by their content.

Precisely how the Charter Schools Institute uses the Renewal Benchmarks, both at renewal and during the charter period, is explained in greater detail in the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University of New York (Renewal Practices)*. However, key points as to how they are used at renewal are repeated here.

- The Charter Schools Institute does not have a point system for determining whether a school will be renewed. In other words, a school cannot simply tally up the number of benchmarks it meets to determine whether it will be renewed.
- A large part of why such a tally is impossible is that some benchmarks count more than others. In particular, the State University gives the greatest weight to how well the school met its academic Accountability Plan measures. As such, despite the fact that this comprises only a single benchmark, a school's performance on that benchmark is critical. Indeed, it is so important that while fiscal and organizational failures can cause a school to not be renewed (if sufficiently serious), excellence in these areas will not excuse poor academic performance.
- The Institute does not use every benchmark during every kind of renewal review, and how they are used differs depending on a school's circumstances. For instance, the qualitative academic performance benchmarks (Benchmarks 1B-1F) are given far less weight when a school that has been renewed one or more times previously, applies for renewal again. Similarly, less weight is accorded these benchmarks during an initial renewal review where a school has shown that it has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
- Again as set forth in the *Renewal Practices*, in greater detail, aside from the benchmark regarding meeting the academic Accountability Plan goals (which is singular in its importance), no school should fear that a failure to meet every benchmark means that the

school is not in a position to make a case for renewal. To the contrary, the Institute has yet to see a school—or any institution for that matter—that is perfect in every respect. The Institute appreciates that the benchmarks set a very high standard collectively. While the Institute certainly hopes and expects that schools aim high, it is understood that a school’s reach will necessarily exceed its grasp in at least some aspects.

- As the Renewal Benchmarks indicate, they have been revised over time. The present version is marked Version 3.2. As noted above, the Renewal Benchmarks are indicators and tools used by the Institute to gather information and evidence. And while it is expected that schools pay close attention to them, they are not the be all and end all.

The benchmarks are organized around the four renewal questions, which each school must answer in submitting a renewal application. These four questions are inter-connected, to say the least. For instance, many of the benchmarks surrounding academic performance could reasonably be placed under the heading of organizational effectiveness. In the same way, it is hard to separate out whether a board made fiscally sound decisions from whether it made decisions that were programmatically effective. In sum, there is the potential for an artificial quality to creep into the nomenclature that the Institute has chosen to use, and schools are urged not to spend time thinking about where a particular benchmark appears but rather to expend their energies on having a better school. We note that it is precisely for that reason, therefore, that the Institute does not tally the benchmarks and make renewal decisions based on how many a school met or did not meet.

In the same vein, a close reading of the benchmarks will reveal some redundancy. Again because the categories are porous, the redundancy is intentional and often signifies the importance of an issue. Thus for instance, the benchmark regarding “use of assessment data” (Benchmark 1B) includes as a desired quality that the school have made changes to its curriculum and pedagogy where the data indicate gaps in learning and achievement. At the same time, an entire benchmark is devoted to the systems that the school has in place for remediation (Benchmark 1D.3).

While the former element in Benchmark 1B might logically suffice to capture whether a school has a robust and effective remediation program, the separate benchmark makes clear the importance the Institute places on having effective systems for bringing at risk students to grade level. More generally, some redundancy exists because we sometimes are looking at the same issue but using a different focus. An example of this is that in Benchmark 1D.1, we will gather evidence regarding the school leadership’s effectiveness at driving the school to excellence; that same issue is raised again in Benchmark 2C.1, but this time from the perspective of the school board’s performance.

In closing, the Renewal Benchmarks are a key guide for schools and the Institute. As noted above, more specific details on the Institute’s use of the benchmarks are outlined in the Renewal Practices. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any additional questions.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</p>
<p>Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p>1A.1 English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.4 Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
<p>Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the regular administration of assessments, and the regular assignment of student work, e.g., projects, papers, etc., that are aligned to the state performance standards and to the school's curricular scope and sequence; • the systematic collection of data from such assessments and student work; • the use of protocols and procedures that ensure that the scoring of standardized and other assessments as well as student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school's use of assessment data to determine accurately whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school leadership’s use of assessment data to monitor and make improvements and changes to the school’s curriculum and instruction, e.g., changes to remediation, professional development, personnel, etc.; • teachers’ use of assessment data to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction, e.g., re-teaching a key skill where data indicates that the skill was not learned the first time; • a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; and • the regular communication of assessment outcomes to the entire school community, including communication to parents not only of their children’s individual performances but of the performance of the school as a whole.
<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has defined with precision in each grade and core academic subject the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve—at a minimum such skills and knowledge are aligned with and as rigorous as the relevant state performance standards; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible for teaching and have timely access to guidelines (scope and sequence, pacing charts, etc.) available for developing lesson plans; • teachers develop lesson plans that are in alignment with the guidelines and follow those plans; and • the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.
<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the priorities set by the school’s leadership are responsive to and consistent with achieving the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals and addressing deficiencies; these priorities are communicated to, and understood by, the school’s instructional staff; • the school’s leadership has taken concerted and consistent action in line with these priorities;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school’s leadership has in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teachers’ effectiveness and quality; • the school’s leadership, based on classroom visits, and other data available to it, provides direct ongoing coaching and support in classrooms as well as structured opportunities for teachers to plan for the delivery of the instructional program; • the school’s leadership makes staffing decisions that are driven by its evaluation system and has in place a system for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and other instructional personnel that the school needs to meet its academic goals and measures; • the chief executive has deployed a leadership team whose members, in executing their roles and responsibilities, are able to support the effective delivery of the instructional program; and • the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations.
	<p>1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers demonstrate subject-matter competency in the subjects they teach; • lessons are focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards and reflect a clear understanding of students’ current skill and knowledge; • students are fully engaged in focused, purposeful activities; • instruction is delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • instructional time is maximized, transitions are efficient, there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers ask challenging questions to provoke student problem solving skills and assess student learning.
	<p>1D.3 The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployment of resources sufficient to support interventions and implement programs, which reflect a range of services and needs (in-class and remedial support, special education and ELL programs), depending on students' academic and/or behavioral needs; • screening procedures for identifying students and providing them with the appropriate intervention, including appropriate Child Find procedures; • a common understanding among classroom teachers of the interventions and services available to students at risk of academic failure, as well as procedures for accessing them; • coordination of interventions and services with those of the mainstream program; and • monitoring the performance of students and using established school-wide and legal exit criteria for students, who based on their performance or other required assessments and evaluations, no longer need special interventions or services.
<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued; • low-level misbehavior is not tolerated, e.g., students are not allowed to opt-out of learning or engage in quiet chatter during class time; • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient resources to support a comprehensive program; • the content of the program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional strategy; • annual plans are derived from a school needs-assessment, based on identified instructional weaknesses, teacher interests, and analyses of student outcomes; • the school earmarks effective, ongoing support and training to novice teachers and teachers new to the school; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</p>
<p>Benchmark 2A School Specific Non-Academic Goals</p>	<p>2A The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).</p>
<p>Benchmark 2B Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders are aware of, and can articulate, the mission and key design elements; and • the school has carried out the components of its mission statement and implemented its key design elements.
<p>Benchmark 2C Governance</p>	<p>2C.1 The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board will have received regular reports in writing from the school leadership in regards to key indicators of the school’s academic progress; the content of those reports, and a calendar for them, will have been agreed to by the board and the leadership team;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board (or a committee thereof) will understand the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight; • the board will have conducted formal evaluations of the school’s management and will have acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrate shortcomings in management’s performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board will have taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the board will not have made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; • the board will have established a set of priorities and a strategic plan that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and will have effectively worked to implement those goals and plans; and • the board will have in place a process for selecting new members as needed and structural continuity.
	<p>2C.2 The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics)—which are consistent with those set forth in the charter—and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school’s charter; • the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts-of-interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts-of-interest in a clear and transparent manner; • the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy, including acting in a timely fashion on such complaints; • the school has abided by its by-laws, including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; and • the school board has in place a set of board policies which are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p>	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the great majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; • a large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school; • parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and • students have strong positive attitudes (including an attendance rate exceeding that of comparable public schools).
<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p>	<p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during the term of its charter, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements; • at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations; • the school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met; • the school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house, and where appropriate, independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?	
Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning	3A	<p>The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • the budget process starts early and input from board members, school administration and staff is solicited and considered in developing the budget; • the school’s long-range fiscal plan is compared frequently to actual progress and adjusted to meet changing conditions; and • budget variances are analyzed routinely and material variance are discussed and addressed at the board level including any necessary budget revisions.
Benchmark 3B Internal Controls	3B	<p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management’s direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies and analyzes risks and takes actions to mitigate such risks; • the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out; • the school monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school’s board members and employees adhere to a code of ethics; • the school makes purchasing decisions that consider price, quality and dependability and makes each purchasing selection with the intention of maintaining a top-quality school; • the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; • the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; • the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements; • a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; • the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; • the school ensures that employees, board members and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and • the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, State Education Department, or the Institute, if needed.
<p>Benchmark 3C Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p> <p>The following reports will have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual financial statement audit reports, including federal Single Audit report if applicable. • annual budgets and cash flow statements. • un-audited quarterly reports of income and expense. • bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and State Education Department; and • grant expenditure reports.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3D</p> <p>The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly; • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • the school provides education services at a level that meets the needs of all students demonstrated by student results that meet or exceed state standards; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p style="text-align: center;">Renewal Question 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Should the School's Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?</p>
<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>Key structural elements of the school's plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's mission statement reflects the school's overall plans for the next charter period and there is evidence that the school will be able to fulfill that mission. • The yearly and daily schedules are clearly laid out and reflect that they are consistent with, and will allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals; such plans are also reflected in the school's proposed budget, and the time on instruction meets all legal requirements. • Where the school is providing secondary instruction, the requirements for graduation are clearly set out and consistent with the standards set by the Board of Regents.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school’s enrollment structure is reasonable, feasible and achievable and consistent with the school’s proposed staffing plan and budget. • Where the school’s enrollment structure provides for significant growth in existing grades, the school has provided sufficient evidence that it will be able to meet those proposed enrollment numbers.
<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Plans for the Educational Program</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school that proposes a material redesign to the educational program for the term of the proposed renewal charter will have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the school meeting its Accountability Plan goals and presented a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new design. <p>The school’s plan should include a detailed review of the plans in regards to assessment, remediation, curriculum, professional development, etc. The school will also have provided a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new design will be adequately resourced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school that seeks to provide instruction in new grades will have presented an outline of the academic program for those grades and provided research and evidence that the design will result in the schools meeting their Accountability Plan goals in those new grades. The school’s plan should include a detailed review of the plans in regards to assessment, remediation, curriculum, professional development, etc. The school will also have provided a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new grades will be adequately and appropriately resourced. • The school’s Key Design Elements lay out the essential elements of the school’s academic program in a comprehensive yet succinct form. • The school has submitted a proposed Accountability Plan that is consistent with the Institute’s standards for such plans. • For a school that is not seeking to add additional grades, the school will have provided plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For a school that is seeking to add grades, the school will have provided plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period for those grades that it served during the last charter period.
<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for the Governance Structure</p>	<p>4C The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school will have provided a set of legally sufficient by-laws. The school will have provided a code of ethics that details the conduct expected of the school's stakeholders and sets forth standards and procedures for avoiding and/or handling conflicts-of-interest. The school will have provided a board organizational chart that is consistent with the school's by-laws. If the school is to be no longer associated with the partnering organization with which it filed its original application it will have explained the reasons for the disassociation and outlined how those functions previously associated with that partnering organization will be handled. If the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure—whether a Charter Management Organization (CMO) or Education Service Provider (ESP)—or vice-versa, or is changing its CMO or ESP, the school will have provided the information requested in the renewal application guidance (Question 4c) and such information will allow the Institute to conclude that the school will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school. If the school is making other significant changes to its management structure (including adding grades) it will explain why that structure will be effective, sound and viable, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school. A school should have provided plans that show how it will sustain the performance of its governance model in the next charter period.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p>Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4 D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school's fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.</p> <p>The plan should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe all major assumptions used in its development; • disclose anticipated staffing levels; • be accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions; and • include information on enrollment demand to support the reasonableness of projected enrollment.