



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

BUFFALO UNITED CHARTER SCHOOL THIRD YEAR INSPECTION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The third-year inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. The inspection during the school's third year of its charter provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward its academic and organizational goals.

The third year inspection complements the yearly reviews conducted by SUNY Charter Schools Institute (CSI) staff and takes into account the school's own annual reports of progress toward the targets defined in its Accountability Plan. The visit provides an independent assessment of the school's progress and provides recommendations for gathering and presenting valid and reliable evidence to the authorizer as the school prepares to apply for charter renewal in its fifth year of operation. The recommendations represent the experienced opinions of the inspection team and are intended to offer the school guidance for enhancing the evidence base for its renewal application.

Inspection Team and Methodology

The third year inspection of Buffalo United Charter School (Buffalo United) was conducted on April 25-26, 2006 by an independent team of experienced educators and evaluators from Class Measures. The inspection team consisted of Peter Davies, Lisa Bryant, and Dennis Vogel of Class Measures and Dan Ahern and Pamela Bloomfield of Clarus Group, a partner firm specializing in governance, organization, and administration. All team members with the exception of Pamela Bloomfield participated in the site visit. Brief biographies of the team members are provided below:

- **Peter Davies, Inspection Chair**, is the 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 was formerly an administrator with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and a visiting professor to the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies. He currently trains Examiners for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and monitors their work. He holds a Master of Arts degree from Cambridge University and an advanced graduate degree in educational administration from London University.

- **F. Daniel Ahern, Jr.** is the President of Clarus Group, a consulting firm dedicated to helping governments and nonprofit organizations meet high standards of performance and integrity. Clarus Group has conducted numerous inspections of charter schools as part of the Class Measures inspection team. Clarus Group also trains Examiners for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and monitors their work. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, Dan served for ten years as the First Assistant Inspector General for Management in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. He has also been a performance auditor for the Virginia General Assembly, an independent consultant to state agencies in Massachusetts and Virginia. He has taught graduate courses in nonprofit management and public administration at Northeastern University and Clark University. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northeastern University.
- **Pamela Bloomfield** is the Vice President of Clarus Group. Prior to co-founding Clarus Group, she served in several positions in the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, including ten years as the Deputy Inspector General for Management. She has also been the Assistant Director of Finance and Administration for Washington county, Oregon; a management consultant assisting federal, state, and local government agencies; and a course assistant teaching written and oral communications at the Harvard Business School. She currently serves on the Board of Editors of *Public Administration Review* and on the Board of Directors of a local nonprofit organization. She holds a Master of Public Administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Smith College.
- **Lisa Bryant** has been an educator for 40 years serving in a number of posts. She recently retired as Executive Director of the Lowell Middlesex Academy Charter School. She has been an elementary and middle school principal, a special education supervisor, and a bilingual school psychologist. She has taught in private and public schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels; she has also served on the adjunct faculty of Regis College. As an active educator she was co-chair of the Principal's Center at Harvard and was a board member of the New England Coalition of Educational Leaders. She is currently teaching a graduate course at Salem State College and consulting on a number of school improvement projects in the Boston area. She has a Bachelor's degree in History from Boston University and a Master's degree in Education from the University of Massachusetts.
- **Dennis Vogel** has been a public school educator for the past 36 years. He recently retired as the Executive Officer of Interventions for the Springfield Public Schools. He began teaching in South Central Los Angeles in 1970 and has worked continuously in education, serving as a special education teacher, a guidance counselor, an assistant principal, Director of Alternative Programs, and as Executive Officer of Interventions. As the intervention officer, he was

responsible for facilitating changes and developing school improvement plans for underperforming schools (per the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)). He received his undergraduate degree in psychology from Long Beach State University and continued his education at the University of Southern California with emphasis on special education. Dr. Vogel holds a master's degree in counseling and a doctorate in school psychology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

The inspection was conducted in accordance with the Institute's *Framework for the Analysis of School Progress*, presented in Appendix A of this report. Prior to the site visit, the inspection team reviewed documents provided by the Institute and Buffalo United, including the school's original charter application and agreement, the school's Accountability Plan, the First Year Report issued by the Institute in July 2004, the Accountability Status Report issued by the State Education Department in March 2005, the Comprehensive Monitoring Report issued by the State Education Department in June 2005, the Second Year Report issued by the Institute in August 2005, and the 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report prepared by National Heritage Academies (NHA), the school's private educational service provider, on behalf of the school. It should be noted that the team received two versions of this Progress Report: a version provided to the team in advance of the site visit and a somewhat more complete version that the team found in the documents provided on site. In conducting this inspection, the team relied upon the latter version of the Progress Report.

During the two-day site visit, the team reviewed examples of student work and additional school documents, including, for example, the school's curriculum, a revised 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report, school policies and procedures, and school board of trustees meeting minutes. The team interviewed school administrators, school trustees, academic specialists, teachers, and NHA representatives. The team also held separate focus groups of students and parents and conducted classroom observations. The team appreciates the cooperation of the school, the NHA representatives, and the students and parents who participated in the focus group sessions.

School Description

Buffalo United was chartered by the State University Trustees in July 2002 and approved by the Board of Regents in September 2002 under the name of Libertas Charter School. In March 2003, the school changed its name to Buffalo United Charter School. The school's mission, as stated in its Accountability Plan, is as follows: "Buffalo United Charter School (Buffalo United) will offer families and students a public charter school, which focuses on high achievement and instills a sense of family, community, and leadership within all of our students."

Buffalo United is governed by a seven-member board of trustees. Three of the current board members are founding members. The school board contracts with NHA for educational management services: NHA provides management and academic support services, receives all school revenue, and pays all school bills, including the payroll. The school board and NHA co-employ the school Principal; the school board also approves all staff hiring decisions.

In September 2003, Buffalo United began operations in a former bowling alley that had been renovated and expanded by NHA. The school continues to operate in that facility, which is located at 325 Manhattan Avenue in Buffalo. The two-floor building is spacious and provides classrooms, an office, a technology room, a library, a parent room, and a gymnasium. Exterior spaces include parking and play areas. NHA is currently constructing an addition to the building to accommodate the school's expansion to include grade 7 in the 2006-2007 school year and grade 8 the following year.

In the 2003-2004 school year, Buffalo United's first year of operation, the school enrolled 237 students in grades K through 4. The school has added a grade each year. According to February 2006 data provided by the school, Buffalo United had 415 students enrolled for the 2005-2006 school year, which represented only 87 percent of the school's capacity. The school had no students on its waiting list as of that date. According to the New York State Charter School Report Card Comprehensive Information Report, in the 2004-2005 school year 95.2 percent of Buffalo United students were Black (Not Hispanic), 2.8 percent were White (Not Hispanic), 2.0 percent were Hispanic, and less than one percent were American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Students eligible for free and reduced lunch accounted for 91.2 percent of the students enrolled at the school. Approximately 13 percent of students have special education Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The school has no Limited English Proficient students.

Buffalo United has 35 full-time staff and 14 part-time staff. The school's staff includes 28 teachers, one of whom works part time. The average class size during the 2004-2005 school year was 20 in the Kindergarten and 25 in the other grades according to State Education Department data; in the spring of 2006, the average class size was 21 for both Kindergarten and grades one through six, according to data provided to the team by the school. The school uses NHA's curriculum, which is characterized by NHA as a "back to basics" curriculum with a strong focus on basic skills and the teaching of virtues. The school also offers a "wrap around," or after school, program that is provided through a contract with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo.

The school has recently experienced instability in the position of Principal. The school's first Principal opened the school and served for more than two years; he resigned in August 2005, just prior to the start of the current school year. Between then and December 2005, when the school board appointed a new Principal, Buffalo United was led by a team consisting of the Assistant Principal and the Student Support Coordinator. The second Principal was terminated by the school board at the beginning of March 2006. Since then, the school has been served by an Interim Principal, an NHA employee who has been assigned to the school until a new Principal is hired. Thus, the Interim Principal had led the school for less than two months at the time of the team's site visit.

SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

QUESTION 1. To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?

1. Buffalo United has made NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress in Grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science. It is a "School In Good Standing."

Buffalo United has made Adequate Yearly Progress in Grade 4 ELA, Mathematics, and Science Assessments in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. The tables below show the school results in ELA (Table 1) and Mathematics (Table 2).¹ The school had 100 percent participation each year, and its Performance Index on the ELA and Mathematics Assessments exceeded the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) in both school years. The State Education Department has designated Buffalo United a "School in Good Standing."

**Table 1. Buffalo United Charter School
Grade 4 ELA Results
2003-2004 and 2004-2005**

School Year	Total Enrolled	Total Tested	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Performance Index	Annual Measurable Objective
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
2003-04	50	50	4	8	26	51	18	35	3	6	133	123
2004-05	52	52	1	2	15	29	29	56	5	10	161	141

Source: 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report

**Table 2. Buffalo United Charter School
Grade 4 Mathematics Results
2003-2004 and 2004-2005**

School Year	Total Enrolled	Total Tested	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Performance Index	Annual Measurable Objective
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
2003-04	50	50	1	2	11	22	22	44	16	32	174	136
2004-05	50	50	1	2	12	24	20	40	17	34	172	142

Source: 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report

2. Buffalo United did not meet its absolute English Language Arts (ELA) Accountability Plan measure for the 2004-2005 school year. The school did meet its comparative ELA Accountability Plan measure of student performance relative to that of students at three other Buffalo City School District schools for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years.

¹ In the school's 2004-05 progress report, the sum of the number of students tested in ELA does not match the total and the percents differ from the state's official report.

The school's Accountability Plan goal, measures, and performance to date relative to the state's fourth grade ELA assessment are presented below.

GOAL: Students will be proficient in Language Arts.

Absolute Measure

- A. For the 2003-04 and the 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Buffalo United for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment.
- B. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Buffalo United will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment.

Because Buffalo United began operations in the 2003-2004 school year, the performance of Buffalo United students enrolled for two or more years can be evaluated only for the 2004-2005 school year. In the 2004-2005 school year, according to the school's 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report, 66 percent of Buffalo United grade 4 students enrolled for two or more years performed at or above Level 3 on the ELA Assessment. Thus, the school did not achieve the 75 percent measure stated in its Accountability Plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

Comparative Measure

- A. Each year, the percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State ELA Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group):

- Buffalo Public School #63
- Buffalo Public School #11
- Buffalo Public School #17

The percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of the average for the above comparative schools within the Buffalo City School District.

- B. For the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, the results will be based on fourth grade students. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, results will be based on students in grades 3-8 combined.

Buffalo United met its comparative measure in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, according to data published by the State Education Department (SED). As shown in Table 3, in 2003-2004, 41 percent of Buffalo United's fourth graders scored at level 3 or 4, compared to a range of 22 percent to 28 percent at the three comparison schools; in 2004-2005 the percentage of Buffalo United fourth grade students scoring at level 3 or 4 increased to 68 percent, compared to a range of 24 to 28 percent for the two comparison schools for which data was reported.

**Table 3. Comparison of Grade 4 ELA Results of
Buffalo United Charter School and
Selected Buffalo City School District Schools
2003-2004 and 2004-2005**

School	Percent of Students Scoring at Levels 3 or 4	
	2003-2004	2004-2005
Buffalo United	41	68
Buffalo Public School #63	28	--
Buffalo Public School #11	26	28
Buffalo Public School #17	22	24
<i>Source: SED data. No 2004-2005 data are reported for Buffalo Public School # 63.</i>		

- 3. Buffalo United met its absolute mathematics Accountability Plan measure for the 2004-2005 school year. The school also met its comparative mathematics Accountability Plan measure of student performance relative to that of students at three other Buffalo public schools for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years.**

The school's Accountability Plan goal, measures, and performance to date on the state's fourth grade mathematics assessment are presented below.

GOAL: Students will be proficient in Mathematics.

Absolute Measure

- A. For the 2003-04 and the 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Buffalo United for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Math Assessment.
- B. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Buffalo United will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Math Assessment.

Because Buffalo United began operations in the 2003-2004 school year, the performance of Buffalo United students enrolled for two or more years can be evaluated only for the 2004-2005 school year. In the 2004-2005 school year, 76 percent of the cohort of Buffalo United grade 4 students enrolled for two or more years performed at or above Level 3 on the mathematics assessment, according to the school's Progress Report. Thus, the school exceeded the 75 percent measure stated in its Accountability Plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

Comparative Measure

A. Each year, the percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State Math Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group):

- Buffalo Public School #63
- Buffalo Public School #11
- Buffalo Public School #17

The percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of the average for the above comparative schools within the Buffalo City School District.

B. For the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, the results will be based on fourth grade students. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, results will be based on students in grades 3-8 combined.

Buffalo United met its comparative measure in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, according to the data published by the SED. As shown in Table 4, in the 2003-2004 school year, 76 percent of Buffalo United fourth grade students scored at levels 3 and 4, compared to a range of 51 to 75 percent at the three comparison schools. In the 2004-2005 school year, although the percentage of Buffalo United fourth grade students that scored at levels 3 and 4 declined to 74 percent, they continued to outperform fourth graders at the two comparison schools for which data was reported.

**Table 4. Comparison of Grade 4 Mathematics Results of
Buffalo United Charter School and
Selected Buffalo City School District Schools
2003-2004 and 2004-2005**

School	Percent of Students Scoring at Levels 3 or 4	
	2003-2004	2004-2005
Buffalo United	76	74
Buffalo Public School #63	73	--
Buffalo Public School #11	51	66
Buffalo Public School #17	75	56
<i>Source: SED data. No 2004-2005 data are reported for Buffalo Public School # 63.</i>		

4. Buffalo United met its absolute and comparative Accountability Plan measures of student performance on the state's fourth grade science assessment.

The school's Accountability Plan goal, measures, and performance to date on the state's fourth grade science assessment are presented below.

GOAL: Students will be proficient in Science.**Absolute Measure**

- A. For the 2003-04 and the 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Buffalo United for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment.
- B. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Buffalo United will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment.

Because Buffalo United began operations in the 2003-2004 school year, the performance of Buffalo United students enrolled for two or more years can be evaluated only for the 2004-2005 school year. In 2004-2005, 85 percent of the cohort of Buffalo United Grade 4 students enrolled for two or more years performed at or above Level 3 on the science assessment, according to the school's Progress Report. Thus, the school exceeded the 75 percent measure stated in its Accountability Plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

Comparative Measure

- A. Each year, the percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State Science Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group):
- Buffalo Public School #63
 - Buffalo Public School #11
 - Buffalo Public School #17

The percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of the average for the above comparative schools within the Buffalo City School District.

- B. For the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, the results will be based on fourth grade students. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, results will be based on students in grades 4th and 8th combined.

In the 2003-2004 school year, the only year for which data were available and provided to the team, Buffalo United's fourth graders outperformed their counterparts at the three comparison schools on the science assessment. As shown in Table 5, 72 percent of Buffalo United fourth grade students scored at Levels 3 and 4; the percentages for the three comparison schools ranged from a low of 60 percent to a high of 71 percent.

**Table 5. Comparison of Grade 4 Science Results of
Buffalo United Charter School and
Selected Buffalo Public Schools
2003-2004**

School	Percent of Students Scoring at Levels 3 or 4
Buffalo United	72
Buffalo Public School #63	60
Buffalo Public School #11	71
Buffalo Public School #17	62
<i>Source: 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report</i>	

5. Buffalo United provided the team with no data pertaining to its Accountability Plan measures of proficiency in social studies.

The school's Accountability Plan contains the following goal and measures pertaining to student performance on New York State's fifth grade social studies assessment.

GOAL: Students will be proficient in Social Studies.

Absolute Measure

- A. For the 2003-04 and the 2004-05 school years, 75% of fifth graders who have been enrolled at Buffalo United for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment.
- B. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Buffalo United will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment.

Because Buffalo United began operations in the 2003-2004 school year, the performance of students enrolled for two or more years could be evaluated only for the 2004-2005 school year. With respect to the 2004-2005 school year, however, the school's Progress Report did not report the performance of students who had been at the school for two or more years. Instead, the Progress Report reported only that 62 percent of grade 5 students achieved proficiency (Level 3 or higher) on the Social Studies Assessment in the 2004-2005 school year.

Comparative Measure

- A. Each year, the percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group):
 - Buffalo Public School #63
 - Buffalo Public School #11
 - Buffalo Public School #17

The percent of all Buffalo United students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of the average for the above comparative schools within the Buffalo City School District.

- B. For the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, the results will be based on fourth grade students. For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, results will be based on students in grades 5th and 8th combined.

The school's Progress Report provides no data on the performance of the three comparison schools on the Social Studies Assessment; such comparative data are not readily available from SED.

QUESTION 2. What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?

The Buffalo United Accountability Plan contains "value added" measures in reading and mathematics. These measures track improvements in the performance of student cohorts as they move from grade to grade on state assessments and on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) assessments, the system used by all NHA charter schools.

1. Buffalo United has not met its Accountability Plan measure in reducing gaps in the performance of cohorts of students who take the NWEA Total Reading Battery.

The school's Accountability Plan goal, value added measures, and performance to date in reading are presented below. (Text in brackets is a restatement of separate measures for several grade levels.)

GOAL: Students will be proficient in Language Arts.

Value Added Measure

- A. For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of students at Buffalo United will reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Total Reading Battery.
[The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade cohorts will reduce by one-half the gap between its average NCE score on the preceding year's test and an NCE of 50. If a cohort's average baseline score exceeds 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.]
- B. For the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, cohorts of students at Buffalo United will reduce the gap between the baseline performance and proficiency on the New York State ELA Assessment.
[Separate measures for grades four through eight are not presented here because they cannot be assessed until 2006-2007.]

Table 5 presents data contained in the school's Progress Report pertaining to the NWEA MAP Total Reading Battery assessment results from spring 2004 and spring 2005 for cohorts of students who were in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in spring 2005. (The school did not have sixth, seventh, or eighth grade classes in the 2004-2005 school year.) The table shows each grade's spring 2004 and spring 2005 median Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE), the target NCE

according to the school's Accountability Plan Progress Report, and the percentage of students at or above grade level. As the table shows, the performance of Buffalo United students taking the NWEA MAP Assessment did not meet the school's Accountability Plan measures for the third, fourth, or fifth grades in the 2004-2005 school year. In fact, the median NCE for all three grade cohorts declined from the prior year; in two of the three classes, the percentage of students at or above grade level declined from the prior year.

**Table 6. NWEA MAP Total Reading Battery Assessment
Student Cohort Annual Changes
Grade 3, 4, and 5
Spring 2004 – Spring 2005**

Year	Grade	Goal NCE	Median NCE	Percent At or Above Grade Level
Spring 2004	2		40.5	26.3
Spring 2005	3	45.3	32.3	23.5
Spring 2004	3		40.6	25.0
Spring 2005	4	45.4	40.2	29.8
Spring 2004	4		50.2	46.8
Spring 2005	5	50.3*	45.5	34.4
* Prior year results exceeded 50, so target is any increase from the previous year.				
Source: 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report				

2. Buffalo United has not met its Accountability Plan measure in reducing gaps in the performance of cohorts of students who take the NWEA Mathematics Battery.

Value Added Measure

- A. For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of students at Buffalo United will reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Math Battery. [The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade cohorts will reduce by one-half the gap between its average NCE score on the preceding year's test and an NCE of 50. If a cohort's average baseline score exceeds 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.]
- B. For the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, cohorts of students at Buffalo United will reduce the gap between the baseline performance and proficiency on the New York State Math Assessment. [Separate measures for grades four through eight are not presented here because they cannot be assessed until 2006-2007.]

Table 7 presents data contained in the school's Progress Report pertaining to the NWEA MAP Mathematics assessment results from spring 2004 and spring 2005 for cohorts of students who were in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in spring 2005. (The school did not have sixth, seventh, or eighth grade classes in the 2004-2005 school year.) The table shows each grade's

spring 2004 and spring 2005 median NCE, the target NCE according to the Accountability Plan, and the percentage of students at or above grade level. As the table shows, although the third and fourth grade cohorts did see an increase in median NCE from the prior year and increases in the percentage of students above grade level, the increases were short of the Accountability Plan measure. Moreover, for the fifth grade cohort, both the NCE and the percentage of students above grade level declined.

**Table 7. NWEA MAP Mathematics Assessment
Student Cohort Annual Changes
Grade 3, 4, and 5
Spring 2004 – Spring 2005**

Year	Grade	Goal NCE	Median NCE	Percent At or Above Grade Level
Spring 2004	2		33.9	10.5
Spring 2005	3	42.0	39.6	25.7
Spring 2004	3		41.1	34.1
Spring 2005	4	45.5	44.1	38.1
Spring 2004	4		51.4	46.8
Spring 2005	5	51.5*	45.5	34.4
* Prior year results exceeded 50, so target is any increase from the previous year.				
<i>Source: 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report</i>				

QUESTION 3. Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse learners?

- 1. Buffalo United's instructional program does not fully meet the needs of diverse learners. School administrators and staff recognize the need to generate additional assessment data, develop supplemental materials, and implement a clear writing rubric to improve instruction for diverse learners.**

Buffalo United has not obtained and analyzed disaggregated data showing students' performance on the New York State Assessments, which are criterion-referenced tests that are aligned with the state standards. Addressing the idiosyncratic needs of diverse learners requires that the school be able to identify individual student deficiencies on the tests. In discussions with the team, Buffalo United administrators recognized the importance of developing this capacity within the school.

The school relies extensively on the NWEA MAP assessments, which are norm-referenced tests that identify students' place and progress along a normal curve, in comparison to other students who take the MAP assessments. Because the MAP assessment is a computerized test that generates questions based on past responses, no two students can be predicted to have been asked the same questions. The school has recently introduced NWEA's Descartes program, which identifies specific skill problem areas for specific students. This program has been embraced by many Buffalo United teachers, some of whom reported to the team that the program requires

considerable effort on their part, including devoting out-of-school time to identifying the needs of individual students. Support for professional development in the use of NWEA MAP assessments and the Descartes program has been a focus of the school's Academic Specialist. Nevertheless, teachers at BUCS lack a sufficient working knowledge of the use of formative test data to inform instructional strategies designed to meet individual student learning objectives.

The Principal, the Academic Specialist, and individual teachers interviewed by the team acknowledged that the Open Court Reading program and Saxon Math program, while effective, are insufficient to meet the diverse needs of the school's students. The team observed that the school's staff and grade-level teams invest considerable effort in finding and developing ancillary materials for students. Kindergarten and grade 1 teachers currently administer the Star Test because it is criterion-referenced; however, they expressed concern to the team that the results of this test will not be comparable to NWEA results in later grades.

The Principal indicated to the team that grade-level meetings have provided opportunities for teachers to share their best practices for teaching diverse learners. Teachers emphasized the value of these grade-level meetings.

The lack of an effective, school-wide writing program, discussed under Question 4 below, also impedes Buffalo United's ability to meet the needs of diverse learners.

2. The team observed differentiated instruction in more than half of the Buffalo United classrooms observed. In most cases, the differentiated instruction focused on the needs of slower learners.

In a June 2005 review, the State Education Department noted that Buffalo United's instructional practices appeared overly rigid and insufficiently focused on ensuring that students were learning the underlying concepts being taught. The team learned in interviews that the position of Academic Specialist was created in response to this criticism and that all Buffalo United faculty members now receive professional development as part of a focused, school-wide initiative to improve instruction, so that it is more differentiated and challenging. Evidence of this training was observed by the team in classroom observations: differentiated instruction was provided in five of the nine classrooms observed by the team. Teachers engaged students in activities and employed a repertoire of attention moves such as alerting, eliciting and acknowledging responses, and probing for clear answers. The team also observed mixed groups of slower and faster learners in some classrooms.

However, in most cases, the observed differentiated instruction was focused on assisting slower learners; in only one classroom did the team observe differentiated instruction that specifically addressed the needs of more academically advanced students. Some teachers whose classroom instruction had been observed by the team noted in subsequent interviews the challenge of simultaneously addressing the needs of students below grade level and the needs of advanced students. Insufficient work has been done at the school to address the concerns specified in the 2005 review.

3. Buffalo United's special education program is providing "pull-out" services to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Buffalo United's special education program is overseen by a Special Education Coordinator who is also a special education teacher. According to the Special Education Coordinator, approximately 14 percent of the school's students have IEPs. Students with disabilities are integrated with other students, but all special education services are provided outside of the classroom ("pull-out" services). The special education teachers have a supplementary curriculum to meet the needs of the students who have IEPs.

A teacher who has concerns about a specific student first meets with the Child Study Team, which suggests interventions that are implemented and documented by the teacher in an Intervention Log. The Child Study Team then assesses the need for a formal referral to the Buffalo City School District Committee on Special Education (CSE) for evaluation. When a referral is made, staff at Buffalo Public School #26 acting on behalf of the CSE assumes responsibility for the case, conducting tests, convening meetings, and writing an IEP if warranted. The Special Education Coordinator indicated to the team that the IEPs were problematic in the past because they often specified services that Buffalo United was unable to deliver; this problem has been resolved, and the coordination between Buffalo United and the Buffalo City School District CSE is reportedly productive and effective. The Special Education Coordinator asserted that students now make good progress towards the goals of their IEPs. However, data on the progress of individual students were unavailable.

4. Buffalo United provides instruction to students on in-school suspension.

In a June 2005 review, the State Education Department notified Buffalo United that the school had not complied with applicable statutes pertaining to the compulsory education of students. Specifically, the school was not in compliance with the requirement to provide alternate instruction to suspended students. The school was subsequently placed on probation by the Commissioner of Education for this and another violation of law (failure to complete criminal background checks on all employees as specified in the Charter Schools Act).

In response, Buffalo United instituted a program to provide instruction to students on in-school suspension. Instruction is provided in a separate room by two certified teachers who follow the classroom teacher's lesson plan. The in-school suspension teachers are employees of the Boys and Girls Clubs; they also serve as the director and assistant director of Buffalo United's after school program. The program staff reported to the team that in the three months preceding the team's site visit, the following numbers of students were on in-school suspension: 16 in January, 13 in February, and 22 in March. No students were in the classroom for in-school suspension during the team's visit.

The in-school suspension staff also reported to the team that they accept disruptive students from classrooms and instruct them for short durations during the school day. During its visit to the in-school suspension room, the team observed one of the teachers working with a student at a white board. The teacher was assisting the student, who had been temporarily removed from a class, in

developing a list of rhyming words, an activity that reportedly related to the classroom lesson the student was missing. The student was returned to the classroom after completing the list.

During the pendency of the probationary period, Buffalo United was found to have violated the conditions of its probation order by not properly fingerprinting a new principal. In coordination with the State Education Department, the Institute investigated the incident and recommended that the school be placed on probation for an additional six-month period and incorporate certain changes to its background check practices. The State Education Department agreed with the Institute's findings and will be placing the school back on probation.

QUESTION 4. Do the school's standards reflect the implementation of high academic expectations?

1. Buffalo United's curriculum for each grade level reflects high academic standards but is not yet fully aligned with New York State standards. The school lacks a strong, consistent writing program but is working to develop one.

Buffalo United's curriculum consists principally of the NHA curriculum for each grade level. This curriculum, which includes the Hirsch Core Knowledge Sequence, Bloom's Taxonomy, Mastery Teaching, Open Court Reading, Saxon Math, writing, science, and social studies, reflects high academic standards for each grade level. The team learned in interviews that the school is investing significant effort in developing a clear alignment between the school's curriculum and the New York State standards, an issue noted in the Institute's Second Year Report; however, the school has not yet succeeded in doing so. In interviews with the team, board members, the principal, representatives of NHA, and teachers stated that aligning the school's curriculum and assessments with New York State standards is a top priority for the school.

In addition, Buffalo United has not yet implemented a strong, consistent writing rubric across grade levels. (The Second Year Report found that the school's writing program was insufficiently rigorous and systemic.) While several classrooms visited by the team displayed the writing process from pre-draft to publication, others did not; the rubrics in use were inconsistent. Several samples of written work displayed on hallway walls or in classrooms included letter grades or number grades as well as "good" or "very good" statements. However, most of the student work presented to the team for review (as discussed in Finding 3 below) was simply marked "good work" or not reviewed and corrected at all. With the help of a consultant, the school is developing a writing program with the teachers and fine-tuning the program during grade-level meetings. The school anticipates obtaining additional services from the consultant when funding becomes available.

The principal and NHA representatives interviewed by the team expressed the view that NHA's curriculum is a foundation that must be supplemented as appropriate in order for the school to succeed in meeting the needs of all students, to address the findings of the Second Year Report, and in order for the school to meet state standards and its Accountability Plan goals. The NHA representatives acknowledged that the NHA curriculum had been implemented inflexibly in the

past. They also reported that they are currently working to document differences between the curriculum as approved in the school's charter and the implemented curriculum.

2. The team judged the instruction in most Buffalo United classrooms to be satisfactory or better. However, the observed instruction did not engender the higher-order thinking skills called for in the school's curriculum.

The team observed instruction in nine classrooms, eight of which were covering core academic subjects. Lesson objectives were posted in most of the classrooms. The team found that the classrooms were well equipped with consumables, manipulatives, overhead projectors, and other educational supplies. Teachers interviewed by the team confirmed that they can readily obtain the materials and supplies they need. During the team's site visit, the school was upgrading its personal computers; the team saw new personal computers being delivered to classrooms.

The team rated positively most of the observed classroom instruction: two of the nine classrooms observed received excellent ratings, five received satisfactory ratings, and two were rated as needing improvement (below satisfactory).² In all but one instance the classrooms were orderly, and good classroom management practice was observed. The school has a clear and consistent behavioral plan that facilitates a calm and focused learning environment. School order was evident throughout the visit.

With the exception of one classroom, the team found that the pace and rigor of the classroom instruction were appropriate. However, the team also found that the instruction did not reach the highest academic standards of the curriculum – i.e., the higher-order thinking skills that require reflection, association and abstraction. Several teachers interviewed by the team talked of the dilemma of building the knowledge base and comprehension skills necessary for the students who are below grade level while also giving advanced students the opportunity to practice the intellectual behaviors necessary for analysis and synthesis.

3. The team received copies of student work for only three of the seven Buffalo United students randomly selected by the team. Most of this work had not been fully reviewed and corrected.

The team randomly identified seven Buffalo United students whose work the team planned to review. The team requested that these students submit to the team all available school work, including work still in the classroom and work that the student had taken home and retained. In response, the team received work from only three of the seven students. The team's review

² Classrooms were observed by experienced team members using a Class Measures observation form. The form directs team members to make observations and assign numerical ratings in six areas: The Objective of the Lesson and the Plan; Expectations of Learning and Attitudes; Methodology, Pedagogy and Formative Assessment; Classroom Management; Resources; and Other. In arriving at their overall qualitative ratings as Excellent, Satisfactory, or Needs Improvement, team members discussed and compared their observations and ratings to ensure consistency between observers' ratings. Excellent exemplifies good practice; satisfactory signifies that the lesson delivered enables all students to meet the minimal acceptable standard at that grade level; needs improvement signifies that the lesson fails to meet the grade level needs of all students or insufficiently extends students' abilities overall.

found that one student's folder contained work that was fully corrected and reviewed; a second student's composition books contained only one piece of work that had been reviewed and corrected over the previous several months; and the third student's work showed minimal review and correction.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

QUESTION 1. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

1. In each of the first two years of Buffalo United's operation, parents of students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school in the annual parent survey required by the school's Accountability Plan, exceeding the goal of a 90 percent satisfaction rate established for the 2007-2008 school year. The parent response rate to the survey dropped considerably with the school's change to an automated telephone survey system in the spring of 2005

The school's Accountability Plan contains the following goal and measure pertaining to parent satisfaction:

GOAL: Buffalo United will achieve a high rate of parent satisfaction, as measured on an annual basis.

Measure 1

A parent survey will be conducted on at least an annual basis. Baseline data will be established in school year 2003-2004. Progress will be measured at least annually to ensure the school meets or exceeds an overall parent satisfaction rate of 90% by the 2007-08 school year, based on at least 75% of the parents responding.

Buffalo United has conducted parent satisfaction surveys in the spring of 2004, 2005, and 2006. According to the school's Progress Report, 81.9 percent of parents responding to a manual survey in the spring of 2004 reported an average rate of satisfaction with the school of 95.6 percent.

In the spring of 2005, when the school changed to an automated telephone survey, the parent response rate dropped from 81.9 percent to 29 percent. The spring 2005 survey reportedly yielded an average parent satisfaction rate of 95 percent. Although the Accountability Plan requires that satisfaction be measured "based on at least 75% of the parents responding," and although only 29 percent of parents responded in the spring of 2005, the school's Progress Report asserts that the above-cited measure has been achieved; clearly, it was not.

In evaluating the school's performance on this measure, the Progress Report states: "In order to improve future response rates, the school will implement a focused communication and training program for parents and staff." Information provided to the team indicates that the school achieved a response rate of 50 percent in the parent satisfaction survey conducted in the spring of

2006. The summary of the 2006 survey results provided to the team did not specify the overall parent satisfaction rate.

When asked about the most recent telephone survey, parents participating in the team's parent focus group (discussed below) said that in March 2006, they had received cards telling them about the survey and how to complete it. According to the parents interviewed, the telephone survey consisted of eight or nine questions and took four to six minutes to complete. A separate survey was required for each child; when a parent completed the survey for one child, the parent was expected to dial into the telephone survey once more and retake the survey, re-entering some of the same information. Thus, completing the parent satisfaction survey has proved time-consuming for parents with multiple children in the school. The parents noted that teachers mentioned the survey in parent-teacher conferences with parents who had not responded to the survey and that the school had created an incentive for children to encourage parents to respond: parents who responded to the survey received a code at the end of the survey entitling their children to receive an ice cream.

2. Participants in the parent focus group expressed a high level of satisfaction with Buffalo United.

The parent focus group led by the team consisted of five mothers and one grandmother, most of whom serve as volunteers in the school. These parents had a total of ten children in grades K-3 and 6, and at least two of these were children receiving special education services. They expressed a high level of satisfaction with Buffalo United, the curriculum, the teachers, and what they described as the general "atmosphere," by which they said they meant the facility, resources, and the attitude of teachers and administrators. They told the team that teachers at the school pay attention to the differences among children, challenging the children to do as well as they can and informing their parents if they are not doing as well as they can. The parents also indicated that they like the school uniforms, the student handbook as well as the requirement that the handbook be signed, and their ability to check student progress on line.

The parents in the focus group reported that the frequent changes in school leadership over the past year have not adversely affected their children in the classroom; they credited the efforts of the teachers for this. They did, however, observe differences in the way the various school leaders have interacted with parents and children, and they expressed appreciation for the Interim Principal's accessibility and day-to-day interaction with parents and children.

Asked what they would change about Buffalo United, the parents in the focus group mentioned that they would like the school to provide buses to transport students to and from school; that they would like to see more music and instruments, sports, and social clubs; and that they would like to see foreign language classes introduced in earlier grades.

3. Participants in the student focus group expressed the view that Buffalo United provides them with a good education and a safe and academically supportive environment. Some students expressed the view that the school is too rigid and does not offer enough nonacademic opportunities.

The team conducted a student focus group interview with 12 students (five girls and seven boys) representing all grades at the school. Three of the students had attended the school since it opened; four were new to the school in the 2005-2006 school year. The students reported that they came to the school because their parents were dissatisfied with the schools that they were previously attending. All students agreed that they are getting a good education at Buffalo United and that the teachers are responsive to their academic needs. They also reported that they definitely feel safe at the school and that the school tightly controls discipline.

Some of the students' comments indicated that they feel that the school is too rigid, that it is "no fun," and that there is not enough free time and outdoor time in the schedule. Some also expressed the view that there are not enough nonacademic activities at the school and that they would like more sports, basketball courts, and field trips. Several of the students also noted that they did not like eating in their classrooms.

QUESTION 2. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

- 1. Buffalo United's board of trustees is engaged in monitoring the school's performance and has recently instituted requirements for monthly Performance Reports from NHA and the school's principal. The monthly Performance Reports are not directly correlated to the school's Accountability Plan. To date, the school has principally relied on the NWEA MAP to monitor academic performance. The school has recently begun to analyze and interpret the MAP results in order to adjust instruction, but the school has not yet devoted comparable attention to analyzing, interpreting, and adjusting instruction in response to the New York State Assessment results.**

The team interviewed four of the six members of Buffalo United's board of trustees, including the President, Secretary, and Treasurer, regarding their involvement in, and oversight of, the school. They described the history of their evolving relationship with NHA and articulated their understanding that the school board, and not NHA, holds the school's charter and is ultimately responsible, and accountable for, the school's performance.

The school trustees told the team that they have not always been satisfied with the school performance information they have received from the school principals and from NHA. They reported that they have, at various times, requested and received training from NHA in how to interpret and use academic performance information, particularly the NWEA MAP results. They received detailed analyses of the standardized test scores broken down by grade level, teacher, and the number of years that the student has been at the school. Last year the school board required NHA to develop a new Performance Report to be updated and submitted monthly to the school board in conjunction with the other management reports.

The team's review of school board minutes confirmed that the Performance Report was instituted in November 2005. The team requested and obtained from NHA copies of the Performance Report for November 2005 and February 2006. The Performance Report presents information in the following three categories:

- Academic Excellence includes the most recent results on the NWEA MAP for reading and mathematics and on the state ELA and Mathematics Assessments. A section entitled “Monitoring and Developing Instruction” is included with a note stating: “Metrics are being developed.”
- Student Information provides data on student enrollment, attrition, attendance, and discipline (suspensions and expulsions); numbers of students eligible for free or reduced lunches; and numbers of students with IEPs.
- Parental Partnership presents information on parent survey results and parent use of the online “AtSchool” program. Another section entitled “School Leadership” is included with a note stating: “Metrics are being developed.”

Some elements of the Performance Report change only periodically, such as the information about NWEA and state assessment results and parent population. Other elements, such as some of the student information, are more dynamic.

In at least one instance, the information reported by NHA in the February 2006 Performance Report was incorrect. The report indicates that there have been no student suspensions to date this year; however, as previously discussed in this report, Buffalo United staff provided the team with counts of student suspensions in the first three months of the year. Moreover, the information reported in the Performance Reports does not directly correlate with the school’s Accountability Plan measures. For example, the Performance Reports do not report any of the information required by the academics measures for ELA and mathematics (i.e., state assessment results for students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years, state assessment comparisons with specific Buffalo Public Schools, and value added measures of the progress of student cohorts on the NWEA assessments), nor do they report any of the required information on the performance of Buffalo United students on the state science and social studies assessments.

In monitoring the academic performance of its students, Buffalo United relies most extensively on the NWEA MAP; the school has devoted substantial effort to understanding and interpreting the MAP test results. The NWEA assessments are scored quickly, and the results are given to teachers. However, as noted earlier in this report, the system relies on individual teachers to “break out” and analyze data for individual students through the Descartes program. The team learned that the level of data analysis conducted by teachers at the school is inconsistent.

The school trustees and NHA representatives interviewed by the team acknowledged that, while NHA has the information and capacity necessary to interpret the NWEA MAP test results of Buffalo United students and “drill down” to the student level, most teachers and staff at the school do not have the capacity to do so. As previously mentioned, this topic has been a priority for professional development at the school.

The school trustees and NHA representatives also acknowledged to the team that they have not assessed how well the NWEA MAP assessments align with the New York State Assessments, an issue that was raised in the Institute’s second year report. Moreover, as previously discussed, the

school has not undertaken the type of analyses that will be necessary to “drill down” and identify individual student’s instructional needs relative to the state assessments.

As noted in the introduction to this report, Buffalo United has experienced an extraordinary amount of turnover in the principal’s position over the past year. The school board told the team that it conducted its first performance review of the school’s first principal last year; that review was somewhat unstructured because the school board had not set any specific performance objectives against which to measure the principal’s performance. The school board reported that it set some objectives for the upcoming year, but that that principal and one other principal have left the school since then. Buffalo United currently has an Interim Principal who assumed this position in March 2006.

OTHER GOALS AND MEASURES

The school’s Accountability Plan includes goals and measures under Organizational Viability that relate to the demand for the school’s educational program and the school’s attendance rate. This section identifies these goals and measures and considers the evidence related to them.

- 1. Buffalo United met its Accountability Plan measure concerning student enrollment in the first two years, according to the school’s Progress Report. However, enrollment for the 2005-2006 school year is below the target figure, and there are currently no students on the waiting list. Information reported in the Progress Report concerning the waiting list and student turnover appears incorrect; other data required by the measures are not presented in the Progress Report.**

The school’s Accountability Plan contains the following goal and measures pertaining to demand for its educational program:

Goal: Buffalo United will demonstrate demand for its educational program.

Measure 1 – Enrollment

Buffalo United will measure enrollment levels in the fall and spring, as well as at the close of the school year, to ensure the school meets or exceeds target enrollment rates as outlined below:

Year One:	220
Year Two:	340
Year Three:	440
Year Four:	540
Year Six:	640

Measure 2 – Waiting List

Buffalo United will maintain a waiting list that reflects at least 15% of the total average enrollment. The waiting list will be measured in the fall and spring, as well as at the close of the school year.

Measure 3 – Student Turnover

Buffalo United will maintain less than a 15% average student turnover rate (excluding parents who move from their principal residence), as measured in the fall for the prior school year. Additionally, the turnover rate will be measured in the spring and at the close of the school year.

Regarding the enrollment measure, the school's Progress Report states that Buffalo United's actual enrollment in the 2003-2004 school year was 237 (which exceeded the target enrollment of 220 for the year) and that its actual enrollment in the 2004-2005 school year was 395 (which exceeded the target enrollment of 340 for the year). However, the school board told the team that enrollment for the 2005-2006 school year has been substantially below the school's capacity, particularly in the Kindergarten, which had only 55 enrolled students, whereas the school's Kindergarten capacity is 80. The school's February 2006 Performance Report confirmed the under-enrollment problem. It reported that the school was operating at only 87 percent of its total enrollment capacity, with 63 unfilled places. (The school's chartered enrollment as amended is 480 for 2005-2006 and it is allowed to enroll 15 percent fewer students.)

Concerning the waiting list measure, the school's Progress Report states that Buffalo United started the 2004-2005 school year with a waiting list of 115 students (29 percent of the 395 reported enrollment figure for the year) and ended the school year with a waiting list of 56 students (14 percent of the 395 reported enrollment figure for the year). Based on these data, the Progress Report statement that "[i]n 2004 the waiting list was 33% of the projected enrollment" is erroneous. As with enrollment, the school's waiting list is problematic this year: the February 2006 School Performance Report indicated a current waiting list of zero, with 63 unfilled places in the school.

With respect to the student turnover measure, the Progress Report states that Buffalo United's average turnover rate for the 2004-2005 school year was 6.2 percent, excluding students who withdrew because their parents moved from their principal residence. (The team found that the 6.2 percent reported-turnover appears to have resulted from a calculation error and understates the actual turnover rate. Nonetheless, based on the data presented in the Progress Report, the turnover rate does appear to be below the 15 percent target in the Accountability Plan measure.) The Progress Report does not report student turnover data for the prior school year, nor does it report the student turnover rates in the spring and at the close of the school year, as required by the Accountability Plan measure.

- 2. Buffalo United has met its average daily attendance rate target for the first two years according to its Progress Report. The Progress Report provides incomplete information on its measure of Buffalo United's attendance rate compared to three Buffalo public schools and the Buffalo City School District. Based on the comparative data presented in the Progress Report, Buffalo United did meet its comparative measure for two of the three Buffalo City School District schools in the 2003-2004 school year.**

The school's Accountability Plan contains the following goal and measures pertaining to student attendance:

Goal: Students will show an incremental increase in average daily attendance.

Measure 1

Each year, the average percent of attendance for all Buffalo United students will meet and/or exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group:

- Buffalo Public School #63
- Buffalo Public School #11
- Buffalo Public School #17

The average percent of attendance for all Buffalo United students will also exceed that of Buffalo City School District

Buffalo United's average attendance rate will improve at an increasing rate each year until 93% attendance is achieved:

- Year One: 90%
- Year Two: 92%
- Year Three: 93%
- Year Four: 93%
- Year Five: 93%

The school's Progress Report states that Buffalo United had average daily attendance rates of 93.2 percent for the 2003-2004 school year and 95.6 percent for 2004-2005 school year. The Progress Report provides comparative information only for the 2003-2004 school year and only for two schools: Buffalo Public School #11 (84.4 percent) and Buffalo Public School #17 (92.1 percent). Buffalo United's reported average daily attendance rate did exceed that of the two schools that year. The Progress Report states that the required comparative data were not available for the 2004-2005 school year, that Buffalo Public School #63 was closed (although elsewhere the Progress Report presents state assessment results for that school), and that data were not available for the Buffalo City School District.

According to the Progress Report, Buffalo United's average daily attendance rates for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years exceeded the Accountability Plan measures.

III. UNIQUE ASPECTS

QUESTION 1. Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

1. **Buffalo United's mission is inconsistently stated in the documents provided to the team. In discussions with the team, school stakeholders expressed the core mission of the**

school in terms of challenging students to achieve academically; other elements of the school's mission were not expressly identified.

Buffalo United's Accountability Plan states the school's mission as follows:

Buffalo United Charter School (Buffalo United) will offer families and students a public charter school, which focuses on high academic achievement and instills a sense of family, community, and leadership within all our students.

However, the Buffalo United Parent Handbook for 2005-2006 states the school's mission as follows:

Working in partnership with parents and community, the Buffalo United Charter School mission is to become one of the finest K-8 schools in the country. We offer a challenging, character-based education through a rigorous curriculum with high academic and social expectations. Our school prioritizes the academic program and instruction time so each student reads, computes, and writes at or above grade level. We expect our students to master basic skills and realize their full academic potential in preparation for higher education and adulthood.

Both mission statements convey high academic expectation for Buffalo United, but only the Accountability Plan mission statement expressly seeks to "instill a sense of family, community, and leadership" within the school's students.

Buffalo United trustees, teachers, students, and parents interviewed by the team all made statements that conveyed the school's mission in terms of high expectations for academic achievement. Although those interviewed indicated that they were aware of school programs and activities that might contribute to a sense of family, community, and leadership, they did not specifically indicate that they understood that element of the school's mission.

QUESTION 2. Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?

- 1. Buffalo United has incorporated character development into its program of daily instruction. The school has thus far exceeded the target established in its Accountability Plan for parent satisfaction with the school's delivery "on its promise of Moral Guidance."**

The school's Accountability Plan contains the following goal and measure pertaining to unique program areas:

GOAL: Buffalo United will provide students with a character development program that is incorporated into daily instruction.

Measure 1

A parent survey will be conducted on at least an annual basis. The survey will measure parent responses to the following question: "My child's school delivers

on its promise of Moral Guidance.” Baseline data will be established in the 2003-2004 school year. Progress will be measured at least annually to ensure the school meets or exceeds an overall parent satisfaction rate of 90% by the 2007-2008 school year.

Buffalo United’s character development program is referred to as “Moral Focus.” Each month, a different character quality (based on the ancient Greek cardinal virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude, according to the Parent Handbook) is discussed with students and modeled by teachers. During that month, cross-curricula lessons convey the relevance of the character quality of the month to all aspects of the students’ experience. Teachers use an NHA curriculum at each grade level to plan a variety of activities to make the character quality real to the students. The daily morning assemblies reinforce the character quality of the month. The team observed that some displays of student works in the halls showed the varied and creative approaches to integrating the character quality into the school program. Students of all grade levels participating in a student focus group conducted by the team were able to articulate their own personal definitions of “compassion,” which was the character quality emphasized during the month of the team’s site visit.

As previously discussed, Buffalo United has conducted parent satisfaction surveys in the spring of each year. According to the school’s Progress Report, 95.6 percent of parents who responded to the survey in the spring of 2004 and 93 percent of parents who responded in the spring of 2005 indicated they were satisfied when presented with the statement: “My child’s school delivers on its promise of Moral Guidance.” The school’s performance on the above-cited measure cannot be fully evaluated until the 2007-2008 school year. Results of the parent satisfaction surveys to date exceeded the 90 percent rate specified in the measure, notwithstanding the fact that only 29 percent of the parents responded to the survey in 2004-05.

- 2. Buffalo United has instituted a “wrap around” program through the Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo, as required by its Accountability Plan. The program currently serves over 100 students. The number of students participating in the program has declined significantly from the first year, and there is a waiting list of students seeking to participate in the program.**

Buffalo United’s Accountability Plan contains a second goal and measure pertaining to unique program areas:

GOAL: Buffalo United will work with a Community Care Program to provide a complete “wrap around” (evening care) program for eligible students.

Measure 1

Buffalo United will work with a local Community Care Program in Buffalo to provide social and educational activities to its students before and after school hours. A student roster will measure participation in the wrap around program.

Buffalo United has contracted with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo for provision of the “wrap around,” or after school, program required by the above-cited measure. The after school program director reported to the team that the program currently serves 103 students, a figure that represents approximately 25 percent of the school population. Enrollment in the program has declined in comparison to prior years: according to the school’s Progress Report, the program enrolled 185 students (or 77.7 percent of all Buffalo United students) in the 2003-2004 school year and only 110 students (or 28 percent of all Buffalo United students) in the 2004-2005 school year. The program director told the team that there are currently 60 students on a waiting list for the program. He said that the program maintains a ratio of 10 students to each staff member as required by state regulations and that the school plans to hire three more youth development professionals, thereby enabling the program to serve 30 of the 60 students currently on the waiting list.

The after-school program is well aligned with the school’s overall educational program. Three members of the program staff, including the director and assistant director, are in the school building for most of the school day and serve as instructors in Buffalo United’s in-school suspension program. At the end of the school day, program staff (the youth development professionals) pick up students from their classrooms and bring them to the afternoon program. They are available to consult with teachers during the school day about the needs of the after-school students, to collect homework assignments, and to connect with families as students are picked up. The team observed orderly transitions between the school day and the after-school program. Each day of the after-school program is structured with a balance of academics (including homework time), computer time, sports/fitness, and character and leadership development. This combination of activities supports and furthers the mission of the school.

3. Buffalo United has not successfully implemented the parent advisory/governance model envisioned in the school’s charter. The Board reportedly plans to address the issue of parent involvement as a priority matter in its current strategic planning process. Teachers and administrators have communicated regularly with parents.

Buffalo United’s charter proposed that the school governance structure would consist of a minimum of six parent/teacher committees. Parents were to chair each committee, and the committees would make decisions about activities and projects of the school.

The Institute noted in the First Year and Second Year Reports that Buffalo United had not fully implemented the parent advisory/governance model. The team’s review of school board minutes revealed that parent committees did meet in the fall of the 2005-2006 school year, but there were no indications that these committees have continued to be active.

In an interview with the team, school trustees acknowledged that they have not succeeded in fostering the desired level of parental involvement in the school. They told the team that when the school board first attempted to implement the parent advisory/governance model, it soon became apparent that the model would not succeed as implemented. The school trustees reported that increasing parental involvement is a priority in the school board’s current strategic planning effort. They expressed the conviction that they will be able to increase parental involvement and pointed to the after school program’s success in convincing 60 to 70 parents to

attend parent night meetings. The school trustees noted that the school has provided a room dedicated to parent use and that the school board plans to press NHA to make changes to the room so that it is more useful to parents. They also noted school board plans to involve parents in the selection of the new Principal.

As Buffalo United has reached a more even keel in the latter part of the 2005-2006 school year with the appointment of the Interim Principal, the school's communications to parents have become more consistent. The school and each teacher send newsletters to parents with general and curriculum-related information. Some teachers communicate weekly with parents, fully describing the lessons of the upcoming week and giving suggestions for ways in which parents can help at home. In addition, the school has invited parents to participate in a variety of grade-based activities involving students, including a Black History Program, a math curriculum night and a fifth and sixth grade lunch. A parent-teacher basketball game and a voter registration drive conducted by one of the teachers were among the other successful parent outreach activities undertaken by the school.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous sections of this report have provided an assessment of Buffalo United's progress toward each of the goals listed in Buffalo United's Accountability Plan. For each goal, this report has listed the corresponding Accountability Plan measures; presented the available data documenting the school's performance relative to each measure; and, where possible, provided an assessment of whether or not the school has met each measure.

The team was given two versions of the school's 2004-2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report: one version was provided in advance of the team's site visit, and the other, somewhat more complete version was found by the team in the documents provided on site. In assessing Buffalo United's progress, the team relied upon the more complete version of the Progress Report obtained during the site visit.

As noted throughout this report, the team identified deficiencies in Buffalo United's collection and reporting of performance data relating to the goals and measures in its Accountability Plan. In general, the Progress Report does not always report information clearly, some of the data presented in the Progress Report are incorrect or incomplete, and the conclusions provided in the Progress Report are not always supported by the presented data, nor are they always directly pertinent to the Accountability Plan measure under discussion. Overall, a higher degree of accuracy and care in the collection and reporting of information is warranted. The team's recommendations for improvement are presented below.

- 1. Buffalo United's Progress Report indicates, for a number of Accountability Plan goals and measures, that the data required to assess the school's progress toward the measures are unavailable. The school should institute the necessary data collection and reporting procedures to enable the school to monitor its progress relative to all goals and measures contained in its Accountability Plan. If it is not possible to collect and report data relating to a measure on a timely basis, the school should provide the information in an updated report and in subsequent annual reports.**
- 2. Buffalo United should ensure that its Progress Reports present accurate, complete information and that report conclusions are based upon an analysis of the data pertaining to the specific measures stated in the Accountability Plan.**

APPENDIX A

FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PROGRESS

Category	Criteria	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse students?	Class visits, interviews, data review, Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Do the school's standards reflect the implementation of high academic expectations?	Review of curriculum documents; review of student work; class visits
Organizational Viability	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey results
	Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?	Personnel evaluation policies, minutes and agendas of board, staff meetings
Unique Aspects	Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?	Interviews, document reviews
	Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?	Accountability Plan, Progress Reports, other docs unique to each school