



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE AS TO THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER RENEWAL OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP CHARTER SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 9, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
Reader’s Guide	Page 5
School Description.....	Page 8
Recommendation and Executive Summary	Page 9
Findings and Discussion	Page 11
Renewal Benchmarks	Page 17

INTRODUCTION

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 (the “Act”) authorizes the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “Board of Trustees”) to grant charters for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools. Charter schools provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.¹

In order to assist the Board of Trustees in their responsibilities under the Act, the Board of Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York (the “Institute”). Among its duties, the Institute is charged with evaluating charter schools’ applications for renewal and providing its resulting findings and recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the Board of Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, the merits of a school’s case for renewal. It has been created and issued pursuant to the “Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewals of Charters for State University Authorized Charter Schools” (the “State University Renewal Practices”).² More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

¹ See § 2850 of the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

²The State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (revised January 25, 2005) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application:

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.³

The Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.⁴

As a charter authorizing entity, the Board of Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings:

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner; and
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.⁵

Where the Board of Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.⁶ The Regents may approve or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation. In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the initial charter expires. In the latter case (return to the Board of Trustees), the Board of Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the Board of Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law.⁷

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

⁴ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/howto/renewal.html>.

⁵ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁶ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

⁷ See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

Process for Renewal

While that renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan")⁸ setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").⁹ This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures. Reports and de-briefings for the school's Board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute provides general advice as to potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

By the start of the fifth year of a school's charter (as set forth above), it must submit an application for charter renewal, setting forth the evidence required by law and the State University. Applicant charter schools are asked to formulate and report evidence of success in answer to four renewal questions:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

The application is reviewed by Institute staff. The staff also conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This audit includes

⁸ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/reports.html> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/Model%20Progress%20Report1.pdf> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

examination of the school's charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and Board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examines audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, a lead member of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete (professional development plans, special education plans, school newsletters, *etc.*). Renewal visit team members visit classes, observe lessons, examine student work, sit in on school meetings, interview staff members and speak informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's board of trustees and administrators.

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of benchmarks that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the accountability plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.¹⁰

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team finalizes the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks are discussed and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark. The completed benchmarks present a focus for discussion and a summary of the findings. The benchmarks are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support but do not individually or in limited combination provide the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation.

The Institute then prepares a draft report and provides a copy to the school for its review and comment. The draft contains the findings, discussion and the evidence base for those findings, but does not contain a recommendation. Upon receiving a school's comments, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and determines its findings in their final form. The report is then finalized, recommendations are included, and copies are provided to the members of the Committee on Charter Schools, the other members of the Board of Trustees and the schools themselves. This report is the product of that process.

¹⁰ See <http://www.effectiveschools.com>.

READER'S GUIDE

This renewal report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Recommendations and Executive Summary, Findings and Discussion and completed Renewal Benchmarks. As this guide, the Introduction, and School Description speak for themselves, no guidance is provided for these sections. Guidance as to the remaining sections is set forth below.

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Institute's Recommendations are the end result of its review process. In this section, the Institute provides not only its recommendation as to whether the charter should be renewed, but the recommended terms of any renewal, *i.e.*, short or long-term, grades and number of students it is recommended the school be authorized to serve, conditions under which the charter is renewed, *etc.* Following the recommendations themselves is a short executive summary that lays out in abbreviated form reasons for the recommendation as well as the findings that support the recommendation.

Pursuant to the State University Renewal Practices, the recommendations made by the Institute can take the following forms.

- *Early renewal*: available to schools in the fourth year of the charter that can at that point make a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal. Schools that gain early renewal will then have five full years of instruction before facing renewal again, thus allowing them to concentrate on instruction and providing them with more ready access to capital markets.
- *Short-term planning year renewal*: available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools will be able with limited review to obtain renewal in order to allow them to gather at least four full years of data before facing a full-blown renewal review.
- *Renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year. Schools that have a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal will be eligible for renewal term of five years.
- *Renewal with conditions*: available to schools that 1) have a compelling and unambiguous educational record of success but that have material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that practically cannot be completely corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to a determination that the school is fiscally, legally and organizationally sound, or 2) have demonstrated sufficient academic performance for renewal, but require conditions to improve the academic program. Such conditions may

include but are not limited to restrictions on the number of students and grades served.

- *Short-term renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year that present an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement, but that have effectively implemented measures to correct those deficiencies and such measures are likely to lead to educational success and students' academic improvement with additional time. Typically, but not always, short-term renewal will be for two years. A short-term renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring renewal*: available to schools that have not presented a case for renewal of any kind, but that are voluntarily willing to enter into a restructuring plan whereby the current school would cease instruction at the end of the school's final year of instruction under the current charter and its Board of Trustees would wind up operations of the school. Thereafter, the school's Board would legally commit itself to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including a new Board of Trustees, administrative team, academic program, enrollment and organizational structure, and potentially a new location, which school then could meet and exceed state standards and all the requirements of the Act. Once restructured the education corporation would have authority to recommence instruction.
- *Non-renewal*: where a school does not present a case for renewal (short term, conditional, or otherwise), the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

In addition to discussing the recommendations themselves (and any conditions made part of those recommendations), the executive summary also contains the findings required by subdivision 2852(2) of the Education Law, including whether the school, if renewed, is likely to improve student learning and achievement.

2. Finding and Discussion

The findings are grouped and separated into four sections corresponding to the four questions that a charter school seeking renewal must answer and must provide evidence supporting its answer. They are:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

Below each group of findings is a summary of the evidence supporting the finding. This evidence is a synthesis of information gathered over the life of the school's charter and is analyzed through the lens of the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks (available on the Institute's website).

The ordering of the findings—with those regarding a school's academic performance and outcomes placed first—reflect the fact that renewal of a State University authorized charter is primarily based on a school's progress towards performance-based goals that the charter school and the Institute agreed to in the school's Accountability Plan. However, while success in meeting these goals is the primary determining factor, the school's ability to demonstrate that its educational program as implemented is effective and that the organization is viable, fiscally stable and in compliance with applicable law are also important factors. So, too, the school must be able to show that its plans for the charter renewal term are feasible, reasonable and most of all achievable.

3. Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmarks section contains each renewal benchmark together with a review of the pertinent evidence gathered during the renewal cycle. As noted earlier, the benchmarks, similar to the findings, are grouped under the four renewal questions.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Community Partnership Charter School (Community Partnership or CPCS) was approved by the State University Board of Trustees in January 2000 and by the Board of Regents in April of that year. It opened in the fall of 2000 in the Clinton Hill/Fort Greene section of Brooklyn (New York City Community School District 13), at 171 Clermont Avenue. Initial enrollment was 100 students in the Kindergarten through first grades, and the school was located in the carriage house of a refurbished state armory that also contains housing. Currently in its fifth year, the school enrolls 300 students in grades Kindergarten through five. It is co-located with PS 270 in a Department of Education (DOE) facility next to a public playground in a mix-zoned neighborhood.

Community Partnership is the second charter school sponsored by the Beginning with Children Foundation, both of which are located in Brooklyn, New York. The Beginning with Children Foundation is a New York-based philanthropy founded to advance educational opportunities for children.

The Community Partnership Charter School's mission statement is as follows:

At the Community Partnership Charter School, families, educators, and community members join together in creating a strong academic base in which students learn to read, write, and perform mathematically at levels that exceed citywide averages. Students will be expected to achieve these high levels in an environment that values kindness and respect.

The school is governed by a representative Board of Trustees including parent representatives, representatives of the Beginning with Children Foundation, and several business and community leaders. The Community Partnership Director is an ex-officio member of the Board. The Board actively takes part in many school events, and through the Director oversees the work of the faculty and staff.

The academic program at Community Partnership includes instruction in the core subjects of reading, mathematics, science and social studies, along with daily instruction in music or visual art, and daily recess and physical education. Students have formal technology instruction in the computer lab at least twice per week, with time allocations varying by grade level. The curriculum is continually refined, based on the New York State Learning Standards as its framework, complemented with teacher-developed or adapted units and projects. The instructional consultant and the Director oversee alignment and articulation of the curriculum elements to assure appropriate pacing and adequate content coverage.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation: The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for charter renewal submitted by the Community Partnership Charter School and that it authorize the short-term renewal of the charter for the Community Partnership Charter School through and including July 31, 2007, with authority limited, however, to providing instruction in grades Kindergarten through five with a maximum enrollment of 500 students and consistent with the other terms of operation set forth in its application for renewal.

Summary Discussion

The Community Partnership Charter School is located in the Clinton Hill/Fort Greene section of Brooklyn and currently serves students in grades Kindergarten through five with a present enrollment of approximately 300 students. The school has applied to the State University Board of Trustees for a full-term charter of five years; in the alternative it has sought a short-term renewal for a period of not less than two years. The school seeks to serve grades Kindergarten through eight during the renewal charter period.

In order for the Charter Schools Institute to recommend that a charter school authorized by the State University Board of Trustees be awarded a five-year renewal of its charter, a school must show that it has met its accountability plan measures and goals or at least made consistent and meaningful progress towards meeting those outcome measures and goals. It must also demonstrate that it is, at the time of renewal, a fiscally and organizationally sound entity and meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law

In order for a charter school to qualify for short-term renewal, the school must be able to present student assessment data that, at the very least, presents a mixed record of academic success. In addition, the school, at the time of renewal, must have in place the personnel, programs and structures, such that, if the school were allowed more time to operate, the school would be likely, in that time, to produce improvements in student achievement and meet its Accountability Plan measures and goals, or at the very least make significant and consistent progress towards them.

Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, the Institute has determined that CPCS has met the standard for short-term renewal and therefore recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the school's application for such renewal and authorize renewal of the charter until July 31, 2007.¹¹

¹¹ As the school's current charter term expires during the last quarter of a school year, on April 4, 2005 (an artifact and result of when the school's charter was originally approved) the grant of the charter until July 31, 2007 effectively gives the school a two-year short-term renewal.

As set forth in detail in the findings and benchmarks, over the first four years of the charter, Community Partnership Charter School's record of improving student learning and achievement over the term of its first charter is mixed. While outperforming similar New York City (NYC) public schools as measured by New York City's third grade English Language Arts and mathematics tests, the school has not posted success in approaching the performance of similar schools on New York State fourth grade assessments. The school has made inconsistent progress in meeting its value-added goals. The school is in good standing under No Child Left Behind. In sum, its academic outcomes are mixed.

At the time of the renewal visit in fall 2004, the school generally had effective systems and programs in place that provide a basis for concluding (together with the outcome data noted above) that the school would, if approved for renewal, likely continue to improve student learning and achievement and would make meaningful and consistent progress towards its accountability plan goals and measures. In particular, the Institute notes the strong support and involvement of parents, the partnership with the Beginning with Children Foundation (which has expertise and experience in operating a highly successful inner city school) and a committed, dedicated school administration, faculty and staff. While areas of challenge remain, including uneven delivery of the academic program and difficulties with behavior management, the strengths of the school should be sufficient to allow the school to make substantial progress in raising the rigor of the academic program. In addition, the school benefits from consistent leadership at the school's Board of Trustees level as well as its location in a suitable facility and its overall financial health. The school is a viable and effective organization.

The school asked in its renewal application for authority to provide instruction in grades Kindergarten through eight. The school provides the strongest instructional program in the Kindergarten through third grades. Instruction in grades four and five has yet to consistently enable most students to attain the level of knowledge and skill demanded by state standards. Moreover, while the written plans for providing instruction in all middle school grades is outlined and linked to the requirements of New York State performance standards, the Institute does not find that the school has crafted detailed instruction and assessment plans nor identified the personnel, programs and capacity that permit the Institute to find a likelihood of success in improving student achievement in grades six through eight.

As such, CPCS, with the limitations set by the Institute's recommendation, is likely to improve student learning and achievement and further the purposes of the Charter Schools Act. Moreover, the leadership team in charge has demonstrated the ability to operate the school in a fiscally and organizationally sound manner; and the design of the school meets the requirements of applicable law. Accordingly, the Institute recommends that the State University Trustees approve the renewal application and authorize renewal of the charter through July 31, 2007, limiting however the school's authority to provide instruction to grades Kindergarten through five with a maximum enrollment of 500 students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

Finding 1: Community Partnership Charter School's record of academic gain over the term of its charter as measured by standardized tests is mixed. The school has outperformed similar New York City district public schools as measured by New York City's third grade English Language Arts and mathematics tests. The school has not posted success in approaching the performance of similar district schools or the city-wide average as measured by the New York State fourth grade assessments. The school's success at meeting its value-added goals is also mixed.

Finding 2: Using student achievement data as a guide, the school has, over the life of its charter, modified and augmented its curriculum. At the time of the renewal visit, the school's curriculum is aligned with New York State Standards and is in use at each grade level.

Finding 3: The school has made progress toward the unique academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan. One component of those unique goals is the portfolio system. As currently implemented, it is one indicator of writing instruction as a priority across the school. Still in development is the use of portfolios as a thorough examination of student progress toward standards over time.

Finding 4: Community Partnership Charter School collects and analyzes multiple forms of student performance information. These data are used in making instructional, curricular, staffing and professional development choices, as well as in communicating student performance to parents. The school has yet to maximize its use of this assessment information to improve instruction and sustain high academic performance.

Finding 5: As noted over the life of the school's charter, the effectiveness of instruction at Community Partnership Charter School is varied. Student engagement in some classes is low due to a lack of compelling instruction and relatively low standards for attention to academic task. In some classes, a significant amount of instructional time is taken up by ineffective behavior management techniques.

Community Partnership Charter School has posted mixed academic success over the term of its first charter. The school outperformed similar New York City district public schools as measured by New York City's third grade English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics tests. The school did not post success in approaching the performance of similar district schools or the city-wide average as measured by the New York

State fourth grade assessments. These results are based on limited data insofar as it has administered state examinations in only the last year of its four years of operation. The school's success is also mixed at meeting its value-added goals.

During the term of its current charter, the school made insufficient progress toward effective use of student proficiency assessments to evaluate not only the quality of instruction but also to judge the effectiveness of the academic program. The school's partner organization, the Beginning with Children Foundation, assesses all students using the Peabody Individual Assessment Test (PIAT) and CTB McGraw Hill's Fox in a Box assessments to gauge literacy levels and reports these assessments to teachers. In addition, the school provides results from New York City tests and New York State assessments to all of its teachers. At the time of renewal, the school's administration reported on a system that provides teachers this information. When questioned about the data provided to them to design instruction using multiple forms of assessment data, teachers' responses lacked commonality and specificity within and across grades. The evidence at the time of renewal strongly suggests teachers are committed to increasing their skills and knowledge in using assessments to inform instruction but that the support they currently receive is not focused and aligned and does not sufficiently equip some of them to meet the academic needs of their students.

The school's portfolio program lacks specificity with regard to what is required of students in creating artifacts of student work to show progress toward academic standards over time. Minimal definitions of the standard students are expected to meet are included with portfolio writing assignments. Examples of the acceptance of low quality work included posted student work containing numerous errors in spelling and mechanics that did not approach the levels demanded by state standards.

Despite the presence of multiple external and internal academic accountability systems, the value and priority given to maintaining positive climate, fostering compliance, and focusing on orderly behavior may have inadvertently overshadowed a clear, relentless focus and insistence on actual student learning and progress. Rather than functioning in the service of increased student achievement, in many ways the school's positive school culture has developed into a priority that sometimes sidetracks a parallel, focused urgency about student achievement.

2. Is the School An Effective, Viable Organization?

- Finding 1: Teachers, students, Board members and staff actively and consistently display a commitment to enacting the school's core values of respect, kindness, and caring. At the time of the renewal visit a similar focus on academic achievement was not as strong.*
- Finding 2: Community Partnership Charter School teachers overwhelmingly report a strong sense of professionalism and collegiality at the school emanating from peers and the school leader.*
- Finding 3: The school's parents and students cite satisfaction with the respectful and caring climate of the school. They identify a sense of community and safety. Some parents indicated a desire for increased academic challenge and enrichment opportunities for their children.*
- Finding 4: The Community Partnership Charter School Board of Trustees demonstrates a strong and effective commitment to the school and stands ready to continue its work in realizing the goals set forth in the school's charter.*
- Finding 5: With exceptions in the areas of Freedom of Information Law compliance, the school's policies and procedures, other internal controls, Board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by Board members and school personnel demonstrate the school's general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law, its by-laws and the provisions of its charter.*

Members of the Community Partnership Charter School Board of Trustees clearly articulated the goals of the school. The focus on parental involvement, creating a small school community where students feel cared for and enjoy learning are clear priorities described by the Board at the time of renewal. One member reported that the number one measure of success will be if their students are good citizens, which can be measured by how many students graduate from high school and go on to college. While the Board's commitment to achieving this goal was strong, the Board's leadership in setting the scholarly expectations required to achieve this goal was less clear.

The school benefits from a strong volume of professional development support. Teachers report many opportunities to interact with other members of the teaching staff, the school's Director, and consultants from the Beginning with Children Foundation as they design instruction. This volume of interaction is made possible through an internal staffing design

and the school's partnership with the Beginning with Children Foundation. While there is a high volume of support for improving instruction, at the time of renewal instruction at the school remains inconsistent and not sufficient to ensure that a high percentage of Community Partnership Charter School students will achieve at levels demanded by state standards. The school has yet to define a consistent and rigorous focus on student academic success. The school does not have a sufficient system by which the school can gauge the quality of student work against the demands of state performance standards accurately. Evidence of high quality instruction married with high quality expectations for student work products was limited to some classrooms. Evidence of a focus on kindness and civility throughout the school was strong. The school's laudable goal of creating a comfortable and nurturing school culture for students has overshadowed the urgency with which it pursues academic excellence.

Parents and students interviewed during the renewal visit cited the school's nurturing culture as the biggest strength of the school. Students interviewed repeatedly stated the school was better than others they had either attended or heard about from friends. When asked why this is so, one student replied, "Because at this school, the kids are civilized!" The renewal team found strong evidence of this during the renewal visit.

In interviews conducted during the renewal visit, parents agreed that the climate of the school was one wholly different than that experienced at other New York City public schools. Parents reported strong communication from the school and from individual classroom teachers both via telephone and email. Parents also expressed the hope that the school's academic program would grow in the way it challenged students.

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Finding 1: The Board has provided effective financial oversight during the term of its first charter.

Finding 2: Throughout the life of its charter, the school has consistently and in a timely fashion met its financial reporting requirements and maintained appropriate internal controls.

Finding 3: The school's financial condition has been stable throughout its existence.

Over the life of the charter, the Board has provided effective financial oversight and has posted evidence of making decisions that further the school's mission, program and goals. The school operates pursuant to a long-range fiscal plan and has produced realistic budgets over the term of the charter.

The school has complied with financial reporting requirements and submitted annual financial statement audit reports with unqualified opinions indicating that the school's financial statements fairly represent its financial position. Reports have been complete and the school has followed generally accepted accounting principles. The school has established and maintained appropriate internal controls.

The school is a viable entity from a purely financial perspective. The school's fiscal stability is strengthened by the support of the Beginning with Children Foundation.

4. What Are the School's Plans for the Renewal Period and Are They Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?

Finding 1 : The curriculum and grade level design presented by Community Partnership Charter School for the term of a future charter contains a curriculum and enrollment growth plan that calls for the school to expand to serve students in the Kindergarten through eighth grades. While the school's written plans generally comport with the requirements of the Charter Schools Act, the school has not demonstrated sufficient success at its current grades of Kindergarten through five to warrant expansion to eighth grade.¹²

Finding 2 : The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.

Community Partnership Charter School has posted mixed success at implementing a school design that ensures students consistently attain high academic success. The school has refined its original design to include greater detail in the areas of content knowledge and the specific curricular topics delivered at each grade. The school has not yet demonstrated the consistent level of instruction or demand for quality student work for students to succeed at the middle school level.

The school's governance structure, the leadership provided by the Board of Trustees, and its partnership with the Beginning with Children Foundation have allowed the school to navigate successfully the challenges of locating a facility and refining its original curricular design. Its future challenges center on the need to define high quality expectations of student achievement as it continues its success as a viable organization.

¹² The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State's testing regimen or revisions to the Institute's Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

At the end of this charter period, the school is in a stable financial position. The school's stability is enhanced by the support of the Beginning with Children Foundation and its securing of a facility space through the New York City Department of Education. The Institute finds that the school's financial position during the term of a future charter should stabilize and strengthen assuming the continued demand for enrollment in the school.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?		
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1.1	Absolute Measures (New York State Assessments): The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
	1A.1.2	Comparative Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
	1A.1.3	Value Added Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.
	1A.1.4	NCLB Measure: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
	1A.1.5	Unique Academic Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.

Academic Attainment & Improvement

Community Partnership Charter School’s record of academic gain over the term of its charter as measured by standardized tests is mixed. The school has outperformed similar New York City district public schools as measured by New York City’s third grade English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics test. The school has not posted success in approaching the performance of similar district schools or the city-wide average as measured by the New York State fourth grade assessments. These results are based on limited data insofar as it has administered state examinations in only the last year of its

four years of operation. The school's success at meeting its value-added goals is also mixed.

In its absolute level of performance on state examinations, Community Partnership was far from meeting its outcome measure in ELA and was closer to meeting its measure in math. In 2003-04, the only time the exams were administered, 30 percent of Community Partnership's fourth graders demonstrated proficiency in ELA and 46 percent in math.

The results for the same cohort of students in 2002-03, when they were in the third grade, reflect a similar level of performance on the NYC third grade ELA and math tests. By contrast, the 2003-04 third grade cohort performed at a much higher level than their predecessors, with twice as many showing proficiency in math and 50 percent more showing proficiency in ELA.

In its comparative level of performance on the fourth grade state examinations, Community Partnership under-performed its Accountability Plan comparison, the NYC citywide result. On both the ELA and math exams, Community Partnership performed substantially below the citywide average. In its renewal application, Community Partnership includes a comparison to the combined result of surrounding community school districts, whose schools most Community Partnership students would have attended. Since these results are slightly below the citywide average, Community Partnership results are closer to, but still below, the local districts.

Given the substantial improvement in performance of the 2003-04 third grade over the 2002-03 third grade, their comparative level of performance was also notably better. Indeed, the 2003-04 third grade outperformed the city as a whole and the surrounding community school districts in both ELA and math.

Results have been mixed on the value-added to student learning according to spring-to-spring cohort gains on the PIAT-R test, starting with baseline scores from the fall when they first entered Community Partnership. In reading, after a bounce from the initial fall to the first spring administration,¹³ cohorts generally showed declines in percentile rank in each subsequent spring administration of the test. These declines indicate that students were not making expected yearly progress in comparison to a nationally normed sample much less achieving an annual three-percentile gain, as called for in its Accountability Plan.

In contrast to ELA, the math gains have been quite consistent across cohorts and throughout the years. Setting aside the initial fall-to-spring gains, there was at least a three-percentile gain in six of the nine possible spring-to-spring comparisons among the cohorts.

The State Education Department has deemed Community Partnership to be a *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years under the NCLB requirements. Community Partnership did not include any unique outcome measures in its Accountability Plan.

In addition to presenting data on these outcome measures, the Community Partnership Accountability Plan includes outcome measures on the percent of students scoring above grade-level on the PIAT-R test in ELA and math, as well as Fox in a Box, an early childhood language assessment. Community Partnership also sets goals for the percent of low-performing students showing improvement in report card grades, for writing and for portfolios. Results in the renewal application of the additional PIAT-R measures parallel the PIAT-R outcomes discussed above. Results of the other measures are inconclusive

¹³ Community Partnership reports gains from the initial fall test administration to subsequent spring administrations.

about overall student achievement and learning. To the extent that the scoring of these assessments is valid and reliable, the assessment results are useful for instructional planning.

Overall, Community Partnership presents limited data at renewal. The various outcome measures indicate the oldest cohort of Community Partnership students have shown limited achievement. The measures of student performance on state and city exams show that the 2003-04 fourth grade students are no better prepared than their peers in the city as a whole or in surrounding districts.

The younger cohorts have performed better: in contrast to the fourth grade, all 2003-04 cohorts scored above grade level in both ELA and math on the PIAT-R. Furthermore, the 2003-04 third grade performed much better than the 2002-03 third grade. On the other hand, while there have been consistent gains in math on the PIAT-R, ELA achievement has been flat.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, Community Partnership set outcome measures to demonstrate its academic success in the key subjects of English Language Arts and mathematics, as well as in science. The outcome measures include the following three required types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the value-added to student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of student cohort performance on a school-selected standardized test. The following tables indicate the specific outcomes Community Partnership set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹⁴

In addition to being held to these accountability measures, Community Partnership is expected, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to make adequate yearly progress toward enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and math examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues a school accountability report. Community Partnership's accountability status in the most recent report is indicated below.

Besides the three required outcome measures, and the NCLB outcome measure, the school may also have included additional self-selected academic outcome measures as part of its Accountability Plan. These various outcome measures constitute the renewal benchmarks for academic attainment and improvement.

¹⁴ Please note: since Community Partnership has had a fourth grade for one year, it administered the state examinations for the first time in 2003-04. As 2001-02 was the school's first year of operation, there are no value-added cohort results for that year.

Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Using the NYS-4 th Grade English Language Arts Exam, Community Partnership 4 th graders will meet or exceed the prevailing State standard set forth by the Regents as measured by the School Accountability Performance Index (SPI = 150).	4	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	116
Math	Using the NYS-4 th Grade Math Exam, Community Partnership 4 th graders will meet or exceed the prevailing State standard set forth by the Regents as measured by the School Accountability Performance Index. (SPI = 150).	4	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	144

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Using the NYS-4 th Grade English Language Arts exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 4 th graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages .	4	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	30.0
			NYC CSDs				49.6
			13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	N/A	44.5
Math	Using the NYS-4 th Grade Math exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 4 th graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages .	4	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	46.0
			NYC CSDs				68.1
			13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	N/A	62.2
Science	Using the NYS-4 th Grade Science exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 4 th graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages .	4	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	50.0
			NYC CSDs				60.3
			13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	N/A	51.8
Social Studies	Using the NYS-5 th Grade Social Studies exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 5 th graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages .	5	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade
			NYC CSDs				**
			13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	N/A	

* The combined result for the surrounding districts is presented as an additional comparison; it is not included in the Accountability Plan.

** Results of the 2004 administration of the fifth grade New York State Social Studies exam are not currently available. 2004-05 is the first year the school has enrolled fifth grade students.

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Using the NYC-3 rd Grade Reading exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 3 rd graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages.	3	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	38.8	57.1
			NYC CSDs 13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	43.4	45.7
						36.9	36.7
Math	Using the NYC-3 rd Grade Math exam, the Community Partnership average performance of all 3 rd graders will be at least as high as New York Citywide averages.	3	CPCS	No students in grade	No students in grade	30.6*	60.8**
			NYC CSDs 13,14,16 *	N/A	N/A	51.7	57.7
						45.1	47.6

*CPCS reports this as 30%

**CPCS reports this as 62%

Value-Added to Student Learning According to Spring-to-Spring Cohort Gains

Accountability Plan		Results						
Subject	Outcome Measure	Entry Grade	Baseline		Change in Percentile from Previous Test Administration			
			Year	Percentile Rank (Fall test)	Spring Year 1	Spring Year 2	Spring Year 3	Spring Year 4
Reading	Using the first administration of the PIAT-R for grades K-5 as a baseline for national percentile ranking, each cohort will improve, on average, 3 percentiles in national percentile ranking in each successive administration of the PIAT-R. (Results reported in NCEs)	1	2000-01	55.0	(-2.0)	(-12.1)	4.3	(-1.2)
		K	2000-01	68.8	0.8	(-8.8)	(-4.3)	1.5
		K	2001-02	55.3	11.3	(-6.5)	(-7.8)	
		K	2002-03	52.9	14.5	(-14.8)		
		K	2003-04	57.4	17.4			
Math	Using the first administration of the PIAT-R for grades K-5 as a baseline for national percentile ranking, each cohort will improve, on average, 3 percentiles in national percentile ranking in each successive administration of the PIAT-R. (Results reported in NCEs)	1	2000-01	37.8	5.2	5.9	16.5	(-17.2)
		K	2000-01	41.6	8.4	3.1	13.7	0.8
		K	2001-02	40.1	7.8	18.0	(-2.7)	
		K	2002-03	30.6	19.7	3.7		
		K	2003-04	37.0	28.6			

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states Community Partnership's 2003-04 School Accountability Status: *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years.

Student Achievement According to Unique Academic Measures

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Baseline		Percent Change from Previous Test Administration			
		Entry Grade	Year	Percent a/a Grade Level (Fall Test)	Spring Year 1	Spring Year 2	Spring Year 3
Reading	The PIAT-R will be administered for each student in grades K-5 yearly through the 5 th grade. Using the first administration as a baseline, in each subsequent year there will be a 10% increase in the total number of students who perform at or above ('a/a') grade level.	1	2000-01	52.0	4.0	(-16.0)	0.0
		K	2000-01	61.3	9.7	(-12.9)	9.6
		K	2001-02	50.0	36.7	(-30.0)	(-3.4)
		K	2002-03	75.6	14.6	(-24.3)	
		K	2003-04	59.2	14.3		
Math	The PIAT-R will be administered for each student in grades K-5 yearly through the 5 th grade. Using the first administration as a baseline, in each subsequent year there will be a 10% increase in the total number of students who perform at or above ('a/a') grade level.	1	2000-01	36.0	(-8.0)	16.0	28.0
		K	2000-01	29.0	22.6	6.5	9.6
		K	2001-02	26.7	20.0	33.3	(-10.0)
		K	2002-03	19.0	42.9	9.5	
		K	2003-04	32.7	36.7		

Accountability Plan		Results	
Subjects	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year
			2003-04
ELA	Using the first administration of Fox in Box as a baseline, in each subsequent year, there will be a 10% increase in the total number of students who perform at or above grade level.	K 1 2	The renewal application states that the goal was met for all grades with the exception of kindergarten, but reports the outcome as a percent of students proficient on various sub-tests during subsequent administrations of the test.
	Using the Community Partnership Report Card, for each grade, all Community Partnership students performing at or below Stage 2 in January will demonstrate, on average, performance improvement of at least one-half stage by June.	K 1 2 3 4	The renewal application states that the 1 st and 2 nd grades met the goal and that the other grades did not meet the goal. Notwithstanding this outcome, the application does not explain the validity and reliability of the measure.
Math	Using the Community Partnership Report Card, for each grade, all Community Partnership students performing at or below Stage 2 in January will demonstrate, on average, performance improvement of at least one-half stage by June.	K 1 2 3 4	The renewal application states that Kindergarten and the 3 rd grade met the goal and that the other grades did not meet the goal. Notwithstanding this outcome, the application does not explain the validity and reliability of the measure.
History	Using the Community Partnership Report Card, Community Partnership students performing at or below Stage 2 in January will demonstrate, on average, performance improvement of at least one-half stage by June.	K 1 3	The renewal application states that Kindergarten and the 1 st grade met the goal and that the 3 rd grades did not meet the goal.

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the collection and analysis of student performance data, including data gathered from an analysis of student work pursuant to a set of well-defined and well-aligned standards; ● the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved; ● the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction; ● the regular communication between teachers and administrators of assessment results and a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of those results; and ● the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement. <p>More generally, a school should be able to demonstrate a system where performance standards, instruction, required student work and assessments are integrated and have led to increased student knowledge and skills.</p>
---	--

Community Partnership Charter School has laid the foundation for a useful assessment system, but has yet to maximize its effectiveness. The school collects and analyzes multiple forms of student performance information including statewide and citywide standardized tests, the PIAT (Peabody Individual Achievement Test), and the Fox in a Box assessments published by CTB McGraw Hill. These data are used in making instructional, curricular, staffing and professional development choices, as well as in communicating student performance to parents. The school has yet to maximize its use of this assessment information to improve instruction and sustain high academic performance.

The Beginning with Children Foundation has a Research and Evaluation arm that administers testing at the school (including training of test administrators) and analyzes the test results. Findings are presented to the Director and given to teachers so that it will inform both instruction and curriculum development. Evidence available at the time of renewal indicates that assessments are used by the school's Director to drive macro decisions regarding curriculum and instructional practices at the school. However, no concrete evidence was presented to show how assessment data was always effectively used to inform instructional and curriculum choices. While the school gathers and disseminates information on student performance, it is not presented in a manner that is cohesive. In addition, the link between examining internal assessment data and improvement of instructional practice is not strong. Teachers have yet to acquire a solid set of instructional skills that transform information on student achievement into improved learning in the classroom. The school has recently begun a portfolio system. In

addition, many teachers collect running records on the students' performance. Members of the renewal visit team found both systems inconsistent.

The school has made varied progress toward effective use of assessments of student proficiency to evaluate not only the quality of instruction but also to judge the effectiveness of the academic program. The Director of Research and Evaluation at the Beginning with Children Foundation analyzes student assessments and provides teachers with a comprehensive profile of students entering a class in the fall. The school has not, however created a common understanding among teachers regarding the meaning and consequences of assessment results. The Director reported that analysis is discussed at grade-level teacher meetings led by the Director of Research at the Beginning with Children Foundation. However, at the time of the renewal visit, some teachers reported an insufficient awareness of student achievement scores from the previous year, making it difficult for the renewal team to understand if all assessment data available at the school are used to inform instruction. In interviews, teachers reported they did focus on improving these scores or change instruction based on past results. One teacher described test results as "one more piece of information you can use to guide you, but not necessarily to guide your instruction." Another teacher told the renewal team "scores are valued, but they are not the only thing. It's just one day in the year."

Grade-level meetings are the forum where teachers work with Beginning with Children Foundation to discuss pacing, topic sequencing, and curriculum challenges. However, the renewal visit team found no evidence of a comprehensive discussion between grade levels to assure preparedness of students for the grade ahead. The school has identified weaknesses in its language/literacy program by examining student assessments.

The school reports the implementation of portfolios as a way to gather and analyze student academic performance against the demands of state writing standards. A review of portfolios across grade levels by the renewal visit team revealed an uneven use of the portfolios and found it an ineffective system for gauging student achievement. The design of the school's portfolio system includes a series of folders for writing in each subject area. Each folder includes instructions describing the type of work that the folder should contain (*i.e.*, writing summary sheets and monthly writing samples). However, the type and quality of work contained in the folders varied dramatically. When reviewed in October and December of 2004, items included in the folders consisted of spelling tests taken in November 2003 and a few math worksheets. The few writing samples found in the folders were mostly ungraded, finished work with no explanation as to why those pieces of work were chosen for the portfolio, what standard or skill the student was working toward, or how they were evaluated. In one portfolio, there was a piece of work on which the teacher wrote "sloppy work" and "4 – Excellent."

At present, the portfolio system is more useful as a measure of compliance and instruction than a close assessment of student performance over time. According to Community Partnership's Accountability Plan, a cross-section of student portfolios will be reviewed by the entire staff at least once per year, and assessed based on the school's writing rubrics. Further, any student not scoring at a Level 3 per the rubric will achieve Level 3 by the spring of the assessment year. At a follow-up visit conducted in December 2004, teachers reported that writing rubrics had been "handed out at a staff meeting" since the initial renewal visit in October of 2004, but that no discussion had occurred about the use of writing rubrics and that no school-wide discussion setting notions of the quality expected of student work had occurred. This information was counter to the Director's comments during the December 2004 that the teachers had received training in the use of the rubrics and were implementing their use in classrooms.

The resource coordinator reported that the Fox in a Box assessment was particularly useful to the school because the results can be broken down into subtests that address

specific skills. The school used both the Fox in a Box data and the PIAT data to conclude that students decoded word meanings using a variety of strategies (context clues, *etc.*), but were weak in their abilities to decode words through using phonics principles. Last year, the school used these data to adopt an additional phonics program for the Kindergarten through third grades. This program included classroom materials and texts, and the school had several workshops to train teachers in using this new curriculum.

The school also reported using an analysis of student performance data in mathematics to change the mathematics curriculum to McGraw-Hill math. The school reports a continuing examination of these data to inform instruction, yet no concrete plans for improving the abilities of teachers to deliver math instruction were in evidence.

Many Community Partnership teachers maintain running records for students. Running records include individualized reading where students read passages aloud to a teacher as the teacher records the student's facility with sounding out words, using context clues, and the ability to answer comprehension questions based on the oral reading passage. Teachers reported using these data to help them group students for reading/literacy instruction and to help inform instruction. One teacher did not have running records on students because she was adjusting to a new role and was overwhelmed with the demands of assessing multiple pieces of student writing in addition to keeping running records on students. The system for ensuring teachers received consistent and effective support to implement the assessments in each classroom was unclear.

<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p> <p>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance standards.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.</p>
---	--

The school has, over the life of its charter, modified and augmented its curriculum. In its renewal application, Community Partnership Charter School reports that the curriculum is linked to state standards and that content is taught within “the pedagogical framework within which it is delivered.” The school works with a curriculum consultant, who is a professor at Rutgers University, to create Community Partnership “curriculum webs.” These documents outline the content for each grade “within a framework that emphasizes child-centered, thematic, critical, community-linked, and rigorous instruction.” The school goes on to state that the curriculum is linked to instruction in a way that links to state standards.

The school’s curriculum webs are organized by overarching theme or subject area. Content areas such as English Language Arts, science and social studies are combined with specialty subjects, such as art. For example, when studying Mexico in social studies, the art teacher will expose students to elements of Mexican art. During the renewal visit, teachers had the curriculum guide as a ready reference and were able to articulate the content areas and state performance standards outlined for each level. Topics from the curriculum webs were in evidence during the renewal visits. While teachers at the same grade levels were often teaching the same material, not in evidence was an understanding of how the curriculum in first grade built to prepare students for second grade, *etc.* Even more critical was a lack of clarity around the quality expected of student work and the importance of ensuring that teachers expected high quality student work at each grade level that would ensure students were prepared to succeed at the next level.

While the school’s written curriculum webs do comport with New York State standards, during the renewal visit little evidence existed that teachers and the Director ensure that the curriculum *as delivered* in classrooms contain the content and rigor required for all Community Partnership students to attain the state’s academic standards. While the mission of Community Partnership states, in part, that the school will create “a strong academic base in which students learn to read, write, and perform mathematically at levels that exceed citywide averages,” the school’s renewal application includes the goal that all students “achieve at their highest levels.” The lack of urgency around the pace at which curriculum is delivered, the low content level observed in some student work, and a insufficient sense of quality required from student work products reveal that the curriculum, as implemented, is not cohesive and seamless from grade to grade and does not fully reflect the priorities set by state standards.

Benchmark 1D Pedagogy	1D.1 Strong instructional leadership girds the school’s work in improving student learning and achievement. The school that meets this benchmark has instructional leadership that has demonstrated the capacity to lead the comprehensive implementation of the school’s curriculum and has facilitated the alignment of classroom instruction, learning activities, instructional resources, support, and assessments. Instructional leaders at the school ensure that teacher planning time, lesson development, and internal assessment systems lead to the successful attainment of the school’s mission and academic goals.
	1D.2 Quality instruction is evident throughout the school fostering an academic learning environment and actively supporting the academic achievement of children. The school that meets this benchmark is one in which classroom practice reflects competent teaching and instructional strategies that engage students. The academic learning environment at the school is one in which effective teaching and learning are valued and supported; there is a clear and strong focus on achievement goals, and student and staff accomplishments are recognized.
	1D.3 The school has strategies in place to identify and meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals, and students who are English Language Learners. The school that meets this benchmark has implemented special programs and provides the necessary resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are demonstrably effective in helping students meet goals.

As with other charter schools, Community Partnership faced the challenge of building a quality instructional program over the life of the charter as it simultaneously experienced turnover in the Director position. At present, the school is led by its third Director.¹⁵ Teaching staff, Board members, and parents offer praise for the school’s current Director and his clear presence in classrooms. Frequently seen in the lunchroom, hallways, and classrooms, the school’s current Director has ensured the school’s tone is purposeful and fertile ground for academic achievement.

Less in evidence at the time of renewal is clarity and consistency regarding instructional leadership. Teachers receive instructional leadership, advice and assistance from a variety of sources that include the Director, a literacy specialist, staff developers from the Beginning with Children Foundation, the New York Charter School Association, and other outside consultants. Many staff members receive assistance from individual

¹⁵ Since the writing of this report, the school is under a new director.

instructional coaches who visit classrooms, plan and analyze instruction with teachers. Many teachers reported significant benefit from these various modes of support.

The renewal visit team found this instructional leadership design fragmented. While individual teachers benefit from one-to-one coaching regarding instructional practices, little leadership and clarity around instructional, curricular, and student achievement priorities were evident. Renewal visitors found that this approach to improving the school's pedagogy does not lead to a cohesive and strong instructional program.

In its renewal application, Community Partnership describes the pedagogical approach at Community Partnership as "based upon a thematically integrated curriculum that is students-centered [*sic*], hands-on, interactive and project based. The goal of the instructional program is to develop the whole child as a successful, contributing member of a learning community where intellectual curiosity is the conduit to high achievement." As noted over the life of the school's charter, the effectiveness of instruction at Community Partnership is varied and, at the time of renewal, too few teachers provided lessons that inspired curiosity, required intellectual engagement, or reflected the scholarly rigor required for high achievement. Student engagement in some classes is low due to a lack of compelling instruction and relatively low standards for attention to academic task. In some classes, a significant amount of instructional time is taken up by ineffective behavior management techniques.

Overall, there is a lack of urgency in improving the quality of instruction in classrooms. The level of instruction is unequal in rigor and is scattered regarding teachers' ability to optimize the use of instructional time. The renewal team observed a large percentage of students not actively engaged in their lessons. Posted student work in classrooms and hallways contained errors without corrections, and frequently included high marks and praise inconsistent with the level of work. Creating and sustaining Community Partnership's climate of "kindness, respect and caring" has garnered a large percentage of communal energy, focus, and commitment, with powerful and positive results. However, the same level of collective belief, urgency, expectations and accountability is not evident around effective instruction and academic achievement.

Many of the lessons observed during the renewal visit lack higher-level thinking/critical thinking skills and unconnected to the school's stated education philosophy of thematic lessons, interdisciplinary and progressive education. Most of the lessons observed were delivered through the completion of worksheets that did not appear to be connected to a larger project. Lessons did not engage many of the students. Renewal visitors frequently observed instructional time spent on repetitive attempts to make students fully focus on the task at hand, but to no avail. Lesson delivery and the content included at times were simplistic and did not engage students. Some adults at the school attribute student inattention to an issue of student behavior and discipline and not to a lack of well structured, well-paced, content-rich lessons that require students to practice and apply the skills and knowledge demanded by state performance standards. Renewal visit observations presented evidence that a lack of instructional quality or effective management skills led to student inattention and at times misbehavior.

The school has strategies in place to assist students at-risk of academic failure. In addition to special education staff, the school employs a counselor, literacy specialist and Title I funded teachers that work with classroom teachers to identify and support students identified as being at-risk of academic failure. At the time of the renewal visit in October of 2004, the special education team worked with 20 students holding Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and an additional 20 students identified as at-risk of academic failure.

Resource and special education teachers use a variety of strategies to support students at-risk of failure. Depending on the student, teachers “pull out” students for specialized attention, or “push in” students by providing them extra attention and support in class. Special education teachers modify existing rubrics for students whose IEPs call for modifying work and assessments. The overall philosophy is to have special education students and at-risk students (who might be unidentified special education students) perform to the New York State and Community Partnership standards.

The school has a multi-leveled process in which teachers can seek support for helping a student achieve academic standards. If a teacher identifies a struggling student, the teacher meets with the Pupil Personnel Team (PPT). The PPT holds weekly meetings concerning issues with students or instruction. Representatives from counseling, special education, and Title I sit on the PPT meetings. Students discussed at these meetings are observed by a PPT member (often before the meeting itself). A follow-up visit is then scheduled later in the year. The PPT reported that weekly meetings were always booked – teachers frequently used this support service.

If the PPT suggestions do not resolve the issue with student or students, teachers in the school can then seek help from the Student Success Team (SST). The SST consists of parents/guardians, the student, the classroom teacher(s) involved, the Director, a resource room teacher, or other members of the staff (*e.g.*, school counselor). The SST develops an academic or behavior management plan for the student. The SST provides students with some support without labeling them special education. The team does continue, however, to document the students’ learning issues and progress on the behavior/academic plans in case the school decides to meet with the district’s Committee on Special Education to obtain a formalized IEP in the future. This provides a system in which multiple forms of documentation (from the teacher, weekly meetings, and the SST) have already been collected to expedite the process.

The school stated, in its application for renewal, that it would implement an after-school academy for at-risk students in September of 2004. At the time of the renewal visit in October 2004, the school had yet to implement this strategy for helping students at academic risk reach high academic standards. The school reported at a follow-up visit in December 2004 that the Saturday Academy had begun on November 8, 2004.

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Teaching Staff</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school’s instructional staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will be able to demonstrate that teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success. (While handled under the benchmark for legal and charter compliance, it is important to note that a school must also be able to demonstrate that teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under both federal and state law with few exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with this requirement of law, the school should be able to show that it has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures.)</p>
---	---

According to the Institute’s review of records, the school’s teachers hold sufficient certification under the law. All teachers at Community Partnership Charter School hold undergraduate degrees in the areas in which they are teaching. Some teachers hold advanced degrees in education. Despite this, teacher quality at Community Partnership is highly varied. Some teachers maintain high student engagement and efficient instructional pacing. These teachers expect 100 percent student attention and focus. Other teachers less efficient instructional pacing.

Renewal visitors noted a wide range of teacher skill in balancing the demands of instruction and classroom management among Community Partnership teachers. There were insufficient instances in which teachers asked probing questions to extend students’ answers, and student work samples did not consistently have teachers’ corrections or student revisions to indicate persistence toward mastery. Some students were observed with their heads down on their desks, or were otherwise off-task and in those classes such behavior appeared to be permitted. Some teachers seemed unconcerned with this. Further, much instructional time was lost in class transitions. Often, teachers spent as much as 30 minutes trying to end one lesson and start another lesson.

Orderly behavior and compliance is so valued in the school that what students are actually learning appears overshadowed in many classrooms. The renewal team noted that, during the three-day renewal visit and in a follow-up visit in December, pockets of excellent teaching were observed. However, based on renewal observations, teachers who create and use orderly classrooms in the service of intellectual engagement are in the minority.

<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has documented discipline policies and procedures (for regular and special education students) and has consistently enforced those policies. As implemented and enforced, the discipline policy will have promoted calm, safe classrooms where students are required to (and not distracted from) participating fully in all learning activities. Students at a school meeting this benchmark will also generally report a reasonable sense of security. A school will also be able to provide appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.</p>
---	---

The consistent and persistent focus by every adult member of Community Partnership on the school's core values of kindness, caring and respect has resulted in a school with a remarkable climate of safety, welcome, belonging, cohesion, predictability and order which is palpable across the school. Students have normal exuberance and energy, but the great majority are notably calm, well-behaved, polite, cheerful, compliant and responsive to adult authority. During student interviews with the renewal team, one student commented liking the school because "the kids here are civilized!"

The constant creation and re-creation of this culture are prominent. Adults both inside and outside classrooms speak respectfully but firmly to children when attending to behavior, without raised voices, without insult, disrespect or shaming, modeling the dignity and self-control they want to see children exhibit. Teachers, staff and administrators speak frequently and consistently with children about their behavior in the halls, on the playground, and in offices as well as classrooms, to reward and praise as well as to flag and modify.

Almost every classroom has some kind of visible behavior system of stars or cards or checks to reinforce or punish behavior, and behavior management is a major focus in most classrooms. Students regularly receive "Citizen Chips", "superstars" and other rewards for appropriate and approved behavior. A withdrawal of privileges or lack of a "star" to take home is usually accompanied by a reflective discussion and the creation of plan for future success. "Powertalk" is the school-wide strategy used to assist students in the productive management of student-to-student conflict.

While students were generally well-behaved as noted above, student behavior is frequently characterized by disengagement. Overall, student attention to academic tasks averaged about half of available learning time in the classes sampled during the renewal visit. Teachers often used small group arrangements in their class and circulated to monitor behavior. In a number of cases, students would become distracted and off-task when the teacher or assistant teacher was working with another group. Some teachers remained aware of the behavior of students they were not addressing, and skillfully brought their attention back to the task at hand. Other teachers allowed student attention to stray by giving unclear instructions for unengaging activities. Low level misbehaviors (heads on desks, students out of seats, talking back to correction, calling out, and pushing) were too often ignored and tolerated by teachers. Renewal visitors noted the most common examples of distraction occurred when students had extended class time to complete only moderately challenging assignments. Indeed, the low expectations and level of rigor in some classrooms accounted for the lion's share of behavioral issues.

<p>Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1G.1</p> <p>The school’s professional development program aligns with the school’s mission, assists teachers in meeting students’ academic needs and school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning and/or teacher content knowledge.</p> <p>Professional development offerings at a school that meets this benchmark are aligned with the school’s educational philosophy and are effective in helping teachers improve instruction. Most importantly, professional development practices at the school are a priority of the school leadership and buttress the instructional program, meet student learning needs and result in increased student achievement. The school’s calendar reflects that professional development and instructional planning are a high priority. A school should also be able to demonstrate that necessary support for inexperienced teachers is available. Teachers and school leaders report professional development activities have resulted in gains in teacher pedagogic content, knowledge, and skills and this expertise has led to increased student academic achievement.</p>
	<p>1G.2</p> <p>The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement that supports the school’s ability to reach the goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has leaders who spend extended time in classrooms. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel, support, and opportunities to increase the instructional skills and content knowledge required for the school to meet its academic goals.</p>

Community Partnership teachers overwhelmingly report a strong sense of professionalism and collegiality at the school emanating from peers and the school leader. The Director talked in great length about the professional development program of the school. A teacher-led committee guides the direction of professional development for the school. According to the school’s Director, the collective needs he identifies from classroom observations throughout the school year contribute to the professional development offerings and support provided to teachers. The renewal visit team found that the school benefited from a significant volume of teacher professional development resources, but that the activities had not resulted in the creation of classrooms where rigorous instruction was the norm.

At the conclusion of last year, the Director identified three areas of most need: pacing, assessment, and differentiated instruction as the focal point of professional development. This year’s focus is on understanding and embodying the vision of the school. During the interview, the Director shared detailed plans regarding professional development but did discuss the active participation of the Beginning with Children Foundation in the delivery of professional development.

The Director reported that he is the instructional leader of the school and spends two or three hours a day in classrooms observing instruction. The Director selects a block of grades (*i.e.*, Kindergarten-second grades) each week to review lesson plans and provide feedback to teachers. He also conducts informal observations of teachers frequently and

uses a formal process for teacher evaluation that includes a pre- and post-meeting to discuss the implementation of the observed lesson.

Prior to the start of the school year for students, teachers return for nine days of an intensive Summer Institute. The Director reported that this time was used to ingrain teachers with the vision of the school and to work on teaching techniques that make the school what it is (mainly differentiated instruction). During the renewal visit, little evidence of true differentiated instruction was available. Lessons observed were frequently delivered to the whole class. While different groups of students read different literature selections, the program appeared to target reading levels, but not to differentiate instruction in the kind of skills and content each student had demonstrated readiness to learn. The school's Director, staff developers and teachers provided differing explanations of how differentiated instruction is ideally implemented in classrooms. Further, the renewal team observed no differentiation in mathematics, science, or social studies instruction. This led the renewal team to conclude that the school lacked a unifying vision for differentiation, expected student quality, and the kind of instructional methods or pedagogy intended to characterize the school's program. As such, the team concluded professional development at the school, while making the teachers feel supported, did not sufficiently focus on common expectations regarding academic achievement.

There is not a formal process for assisting struggling teachers. The Director reported that a teacher's first step would most likely be to turn to his or her co-teacher. Teachers confirmed the welcome collegiality of the staff in helping to improve their craft. Although teachers generally find the Director "very supportive," some also report that they do not always receive clear instructional direction. During an interview one teacher shared, "Things [instructional direction] are implied, not told." However, the school has implemented weekly planning sessions against the curriculum web among teachers of each grade level, a tool that has encouraged teacher support amongst each other.

The Director further reported that his general process for assisting struggling teachers includes informal observations, written feedback and conferencing, involvement of the curriculum specialist, and putting together (an undefined) teacher improvement plan. Although the school had only been in session for 16 days at the time of the renewal visit, three teachers reported that the Director had visited their classrooms almost daily, staying for 15 or 20 minutes at a time. However, the Director did not clearly articulate which of his teachers are struggling, what specific academic instructional goals the individual was working toward and to what extent this influenced professional development decisions.

There was little evidence of a standardized, aligned approach to identifying teacher needs and developing teacher capacity. Further, there was insufficient evidence of among some personnel that student engagement and behavior is often a function of skillful teaching, rigorous challenging content, and activities targeted to measurable goals on the part of teachers or the Director. Teachers are encouraged to focus on student behavior first and then focus on content and instruction. In an effort to remedy this situation, the school recently adopted a Professional Growth and Compensation Plan that describes the qualities of a good teacher by defining the standards (with accompanying rubrics) by which good teaching is measured at the school. This is the pilot year of the program and therefore its effectiveness at improving the quality of instruction provided to students is unclear.

The Professional Development Committee acknowledged the wide variation in teacher quality. One member shared, "Our impression is that teachers get lots of support, especially in working with social and emotional behaviors with students. We would like to balance that work with academics. We would like to make academics more the focus."

Renewal Question 2

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A
School Specific Non-Academic Goals

2A

The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.

Community Partnership has made progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.

Specifically, those goals include:

Goal VI: All Community Partnership students will develop an appreciation for the many forms of artistic expression and will demonstrate steady progress in the attainment of the knowledge and skills relevant to the arts.

Measure 1: For Kindergarten through grade three, all students will create an art portfolio that includes at least five new art works involving a range of diverse media and the majority of students' work will be judged a Stage 2 or better for their artistic merit (as per the Community Partnership report card) by their art teacher.

Measure 2: For grades four through five, all students will create an art portfolio that includes at least five new works involving a range of art forms that will be judged by a review panel. The majority of students will receive a rating of Stage 2 or higher from this panel which will include Community Partnership staff, Board members, and community members.

Measure 3: Using the Community Partnership report card, all students performing at or below Stage 3 in January will demonstrate, on average, performance improvement of at least 0.5 by June.

Community Partnership is making excellent progress on achieving its goal of developing student appreciation of the arts, including visual art, music, and Physical Education/Movement. There are full-time instructors on staff for each area. Students learn the structure of music, how to develop their own choreography and rhythms, and have several opportunities to perform for parents and the greater school community. Physical Education /Movement focuses on development of basic physical skills, nutrition, safety and body awareness with a goal of developing life-long physical fitness skills and healthy lifestyles. Twice a month students receive movement instruction with the Mark Morris Dance Group.

The visual arts program is grounded in values more than in process and structure. The goal of the visual arts program is primarily to teach students to use drawing and other forms of art to record their experiences in life and to develop their expressive skills, although the basics of color, line, and other art processes are taught. Students are taught

to appreciate art as a vehicle for community building. Art projects are also frequently tied to social studies and science instruction. For example, the students created pieces related to slavery when studying that unit in social studies.

The art portfolio requirement in Community Partnership's Unique Accountability Plan measures has clearly been met. Student art portfolios display diverse media captured electronically and available in an impressive slide show that demonstrates the full artistic experience students receive, from field trips to hands-on work to comparisons of classic masters and student renditions of the classics. Regarding the graded performance of student art work, Community Partnership reported in its renewal application that all but second grade achieved the performance goal as measured by the school's report card, and second graders who were below a Level 3 in the fall were above a Level 3 in the spring.

Goal VIII: Community Partnership will maintain an environment that values kindness and respect.

Measure 1: Annual staff survey will reflect that a high proportion of teaching staff and other staff at Community Partnership feel valued and supported.

As reported in the school's application for renewal and confirmed during the renewal visit, each year the administration and staff of the Beginning with Children Foundation analyze the results of the annual staff survey. The 2003-04 staff survey results were positive with staff ranking the school as "better" than most schools. The staff did note in the survey that the school should start an after school academy. Although the school's renewal application stated that such an academy would be started (based on staff survey results) in September of 2004, at the time of the initial October renewal visit the school had yet to start the after school academy. A Saturday Academy was begun in November 2004.

Measure 2: Annual Parent Survey will reflect that the majority of parents' responses are positive as to their assessments of the school in terms of safety, discipline, respect and overall concern of the school staff for school community, *etc.*

Community Partnership's parents and students cite satisfaction with the respectful and caring climate of the school. They identify a sense of community and safety. Some parents indicated a desire for increased academic challenge and enrichment opportunities for their children.

Measure 3: The number of disciplinary incidents involving fighting, disrespecting people and property, and using inappropriate language will decrease steadily in each cohort year.

As reported in the school's renewal recommendation report, the school has consistently met this goal over the life of its charter.

Measure 4: At least 90 percent of students in grades three and above will respond positively at the end of each school year to the questions "I feel safe at Community Partnership," "I think the adults at the school care about me," and "my classmates and schoolmates are nice to me."

The school surveyed 89 students in grades three and four (the two highest grades served prior to the submission of the school's renewal application). Students indicated that the school, teachers, and curriculum ranked high in their evaluation. Less strong, but still relatively positive, were the students' scores on discipline and respect between students.

<p>Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B</p> <p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has school Board members, parents, teachers, school leader(s) and community partners that consistently present evidence of the school’s success with reference to the school’s mission and the key design elements included in its charter application. Key elements of the school’s design are well implemented and the school’s academic results, governance, and instructional practices reflect the mission of the school.</p>
--	--

The Community Partnership Board of Trustees demonstrates a strong and effective commitment to the school and stands ready to continue its work in realizing the goals set forth in the school’s charter and mission. Board members, teachers, and parents have a noted presence at school events and activities. Community Partnership Charter School teachers, students, and parents report the school is safe and characterized by teachers that are kind and caring. The school community is characterized by an environment that “values kindness and respect.” However, the school has not fully maximized its commitment to academic goals in its mission, “creating a strong academic base in which students learn to read, write, and perform mathematically at levels that exceed citywide averages” on a consistent basis.

Community Partnership Charter School Core Values are on display throughout the school. Each member of the school community articulates and uses the Core Values when discussing student behavioral expectations. The emphasis on the first three (respect, kindness, and caring) are extremely evident. In classrooms, teachers emphasized these values in delivering lessons and much time and energy has gone into providing students skills to “Powertalk” their way through conflict.

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance (Board of Trustees & School Leadership)</p>	<p>2C.1</p> <p>The Board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics) and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school's charter. Where possible, the Board has avoided creating conflicts-of-interest. The school Board has also maintained and abided by the corporation's by-laws. In addition, a Board meeting this benchmark will have actively sought information from the staff, parents, community and student populations. The system for hearing such views and concerns will have been consistently implemented so that all views and concerns were appropriately heard and acted upon. The Board will have published, reviewed and communicated policies annually and currently maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p>
	<p>2C.2</p> <p>The Board and school leadership clearly articulate the school's mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</p> <p>To fully meet this benchmark, school leaders and Board members should be able to evidence a strong understanding of the school design and demonstrate that they have referred to it regularly in managing and governing the school. Moreover, the Board and the school's administration should have deployed resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school. At the Board level, the Board should have a process for selecting both Board members and the school leader or school leadership team that is timely and effective and such process should result in a stable and effective Board and leadership team. The Board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school Board and school leadership should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.</p>

The Board consists of nine members: three members appointed by the Beginning with Children Foundation, three community members, and three parent representatives. The Director speaks daily with some members of the Board who are very actively involved in the school and he reports that this is helpful in ensuring that the school is operating effectively. The Board meets every other month and hears a report about the school's progress from the Director. The Board reported that they conduct most of their activities as a full Board and seldom use committees because their Board is small. Finance and Audit is the only permanent committee. The Director's reports to the Board focus on three main categories of information: instruction, curriculum, and school culture.

There is no formal agreement between the school and the Beginning with Children Foundation for the services that the Foundation provides to the school (fundraising, professional development, fiscal management, grant writing, *etc*), however the annual budget defines those services and contributions and such budget is reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees. Moreover, the Foundation costs-out all of the services provided to the school by the Foundation.

Board members clearly and articulately described their strong understanding of the school design. The focus on parental involvement and creating a small school community where students feel cared for and enjoy learning came across loud and clear from Board members. A Board member reported to the renewal team that their number one measure of success would be if their students were good citizens, which can be measured by how many students graduate from high school and go on to college.

The Board reported that they have a process for selecting new Board members and scrutinize potential new members to ensure a good fit with the school. The Board recently brought on a new member that was selected because the Board believes she has the skills and connections that will be needed for the long-term health of the school.

Over the course of the charter, the school has gone through a series of leadership changes at the school management level. The Board conducted a national search for the current school leader and called this process critical to finding the right person to lead the school at that time in its development.

In the past, the Board has been extremely tied up with discussions surrounding the facility. Now that the school has a permanent home, Board members report that they will be able to focus on more aspects of the school's overall health.

<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by survey results as well as the volume of parents who choose the school to provide education for their children and the degree to which parents persist with that choice over the child's academic career.</p> <p>The school that satisfies this benchmark will be able to show through generally accepted surveying standards and practices that a large majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school are satisfied with the school. As only a well-informed parent can be meaningfully satisfied, the school must be able to show that it has provided to parents detailed and accurate information about their child's performance as well as the performance of the school as a whole. The school should also be able to provide data on application lottery, enrollment and persistence rates to demonstrate that large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school, and far more importantly, keep their children enrolled year-to-year. Ideal survey data will also provide an explanation for the persistence rate experienced by the school.</p>
---	--

The school's Accountability Plan states a goal of high parent satisfaction as measured by an 80 percent rate of high satisfaction responses on the parent survey, and no more than five percent of students choosing not to re-enroll (for reasons other than family relocation or severe learning needs requiring a special environment or for other reasons.)

End-of-the-year parent surveys for 2003-04 showed a 73 percent return rate, much higher than in previous years. The data show high parent satisfaction overall; most parents report being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with Community Partnership.

Renewal team members interviewed 14 parents selected by CPCS. Parents were asked "What was the main reason that you chose to enroll your child at Community Partnership?" Parent comments included:

- Seven parents mentioned that they enrolled their child because of the school's strong sense of community, its caring atmosphere, or because "it feels like a family." One parent said, "He was in a good daycare last year. Here, it's like he's still in daycare, but he's not."
- Four parents said that they enrolled their child in Community Partnership because of the openness of communication between parents and the school. They felt that they could communicate with teachers and the administration in a direct manner without getting a bureaucratic run-around.
- Two parents said that Community Partnership was conveniently located to their homes.

When parents were asked, "What is something that you would like to see changed about Community Partnership?" the responses were as follows:

- Six parents mentioned that they would like to see the addition of a foreign language.
- Six parents mentioned that they would like to see more academic rigor. "Seeking to meet the New York City standards is too low a goal, in my view," said one parent. "We should have higher goals." Another parent said, "One of

my concerns is how much my child is going to be challenged.” Still another said, “We should not just be seeking to meet the bar, but we should be pushing the bar.” In addition, another said, “I would like to see the school move forward in challenging the students in all areas.” Two parents mentioned that last year there was a math coach who provided material that is more challenging; they requested something like that this year.

- Three parents mentioned that they are anxious for Community Partnership to obtain its own building.
- Three parents had no response to the question.

The school has implemented a number of programs and workshops to facilitate communication between parents and the school staff. This includes a weekly Family Reading program which brings parents into the classroom, and includes parent development workshops addressing various topics such as how to read aloud to one’s child, select books, help with homework, and creating independence in children. The school also sent a letter home to parents that explained the Fox in the Box reading assessment instrument, and an explanation of the rubrics is sent with each report card.

<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>A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>
---	--

As part of a compliance review, the Institute reviewed steps the school took in response to the New York State Education Department's Third-Year Monitoring Report, and the Institute's March 2003 report, both of which outlined certain instances of non-compliance. The school was either in compliance or was in the process of coming into compliance for almost all areas noted by the State Education Department including teacher certification, school safety plan, student immunization records and distributing Individual Education Plans to classrooms. The school's provision of alternative instruction for suspended students also appears to be in compliance. However, all staff members involved with alternative instruction were not able to articulate how the school would provide alternative instruction to students suspended for more than two days. We also note that the State Education Department has indicated that as of January 28, 2005, the school was only in partial compliance with the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) in that the school safety plan submitted pursuant to Education Law section 2801-a was not complete (though SED has yet to indicate or substantiate in what respects the SAVE plan was not in compliance). As CPCS is in a public school building, the SAVE plan was submitted by PS 270.

While the school does not currently enroll any students with disabilities addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it has the ability to serve such students. Even though the school is sited within a pre-ADA district school building, the school has the staff and ability to reconfigure its classrooms and delivery of services to accommodate the needs of disabled students should they enroll.

While early in its charter, the school had a poor record of submitting information to the Institute in a timely manner, and a generally good submission record in its middle years marred by a few significantly late items. Its fourth year is its best with several items being only a few days late.

The Board generally has implemented appropriate policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with applicable law and has abided by them. One exception is compliance with the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), for which the school has no policies, notice or training. As a result, parents and staff do not know of access to the full range of available records. In addition, the school's by-laws state that the school's Trustees can participate in Board meetings by conference call but do not make clear that Trustees cannot vote or be counted toward quorum by conference call in compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

The school has three Board members who are lawyers to assist in legal matters. The Beginning with Children Foundation has also paid for counsel to resolve various school legal issues.

Overall, the school's policies and procedures, other internal controls, Board minutes and other documentation, as well as responses to interview questions by Board members and school personnel demonstrate the school's general and substantial compliance with the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law (*e.g.*, I.D.E.A., F.E.R.P.A.), its by-laws and the provisions of its charter.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3A
Board Oversight

3A

The Board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school's mission, program and goals.

The Board has provided effective oversight and has made decisions that have furthered the school's program and goals. The successful negotiation with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to provide the school with space within a DOE facility is one example of the Board's work. The school's Board, Director and financial team regularly monitor the school's financial health. The long-term financial plan is examined and updated each year. Budget to actual expenditure reports are prepared bi-weekly and presented to the school's Director for review and comparison to budgeted amounts. Up-to-date budget-to-actual financial statements are presented at Board meetings.

A review of a sample of Board minutes noted evidence that the Board was actively involved with oversight of school finances. At a meeting with Board members during the renewal visit, members demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Board includes members with significant financial acumen. The Board has a standing finance and audit committee and meets directly with its independent auditors to discuss the school's annual financial statement audit report.

<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3B</p> <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>
--	--

The school has operated pursuant to long-range plans beginning with the five-year plan included as part of its charter application. Budgets have provided a realistic framework for the school's spending activities and monitoring procedures were in place. Billings are submitted to the district on a timely basis.

The school has in place a process to closely monitor its financial performance versus its budget. Reports are generated bi-weekly for the school's Director to review and compare actual revenues and expenses to budgeted amounts. Also, up-to-date budget reports are presented at Board meetings and are discussed as part of the financial report that is given at most Board meetings. Board approval is required to exceed the approved budget. Budgets conservatively include a contingency line of \$100,000 to cover unanticipated expenditures and emergencies.

The school's actual revenues (including contributions and private grants) have also exceeded actual expenses in each year. Board minutes provide evidence the budget is evaluated over the course of the year and that modifications are made when necessary. Budgeting for public revenues (per-pupil, federal and state grants) has been conservative as shown in the table below:

Revenues - Public			
<u>School Year</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Variance</u>
2000-2001	\$ 967,674	\$ 817,538	\$(150,136)
2001-2002	1,313,572	1,598,884	285,312
2002-2003	1,695,044	1,826,064	131,020
2003-2004	2,092,397	2,171,340	78,943

Sources: Annual audited financial statements, Board minutes, annual budgets.

Except for the first year, there is a favorable variance between the budgeted and actual amounts. The unfavorable variance in the first year was primarily due to the fact that the school did not receive an "other public charter school grant" for which it had budgeted \$100,000.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3C</p> <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>
--	--

Based on interviews with staff and review of documentation, the school has established processes and controls related to payroll, procurement, safeguarding of assets and other financial matters. The school has established a comprehensive written handbook covering managerial controls and financial procedures. The handbook covers the following areas: bank account authorization and check signatory policy, receipts, purchasing, disbursements, bank reconciliations, payroll, accounts receivable or other assets, the general ledger, budgeting, maintenance of accounting records, record retention and regulatory reporting. Additional systems and controls may need to be further developed as the school matures. For example, given the small size of the school and small number of administrative staff, optimal segregation of duties may not be achieved in some instances and therefore the school needs to maintain compensating controls. Examples of compensating controls that the school has established include the requirement that checks greater than \$5,000 need two signatures; Director approval is required prior to any purchases made, and any discrepancies in the various account reconciliations are investigated. Also, although the school has a system to record fixed assets; it has not yet established procedures for performing periodic physical inventories of fixed assets. The school does perform periodic inventories of its computer equipment and is currently working on an inventory system for all other fixed assets.

The school’s back office operations have been set-up and run by the Beginning with Children Foundation. Under this arrangement, the school benefits by receiving the services of staff that are more highly trained and qualified than the school could otherwise afford.

For each year, the school’s annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. Also, the school’s independent certified public accountant (CPA) has not issued written management letters in conjunction with the annual financial statement audit of the school.

<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3D</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>
--	--

Generally, the school has met its financial reporting requirements. The school has had an exemplary record of filing its annual financial statements and quarterly financial reports on a timely basis. Annual budgets and cash flow statements were filed as required, after approval by the Board.

The school's financial statements have not included a statement of functional expenses that presents expenses in natural classifications, such as salaries, rent, or depreciation. Such a statement (or schedule) is not required by generally accepted accounting principles, but is encouraged. Presentation of a statement of functional expenses would provide greater transparency of the school's finances and provide important information to external users about the cost of services provided and how the school used its support.

<p>Benchmark 3E</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3E</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>
--	--

The school has shown a positive change in total net assets and cash flow in each year. The school completed the 2003-04 school year in stable financial condition. Although the school had a decrease in unrestricted net assets of \$59,646, it finished with total net assets of \$337,144 (\$1,337 per approved number of enrolled students). Overall, the school's cash position improved by \$186,438. The school's operating activities provided positive cash flow of \$274,438, while it repaid \$88,000 in debt. The school prudently maintains a \$100,000 line of credit with a financial institution which would enable it to cover periods of time should payments be delayed. It had no borrowings outstanding under this agreement as of June 30, 2004.

Over the first four years of its charter the school received \$1,141,233 (\$339,827 in 2004) in direct public support through private grants and contributions. These contributions total less than the amount originally projected in the school's initial charter application (\$1,213,199). The contributions have been a key component of the school's fiscal stability. The Beginning with Children Foundation, as institutional partner to the school, has provided critical support in developing the school's fundraising capacity and access to public and private institutional sources. The Beginning with Children Foundation continues to provide services and program support to the school as it has since its inception.

The school has fixed assets (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$244,032 that consists primarily of leasehold improvements, as well as computer equipment and furniture and fixtures. The school has a loan with a remaining principal balance of \$102,666 related to the cost of improvements of its leased facility. The school is scheduled to pay off the debt by August 2005. Rent expense for the year ended June 30, 2004 was approximately \$209,000. The lease also expires in August 2005.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) has made available space for the school to co-locate with a DOE school in FY 2004-2005. This arrangement will save the school more than \$200,000 per year after its lease expires at its previous facility. The arrangement will put the school on more equal footing with the funding other public schools receive and allow for more money to be targeted at instruction rather than infrastructure.

Renewal Question 4

Should the School's Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?

<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Curricular & Assessment Plans</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>The school's curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable and are likely to improve student learning and achievement.</p> <p>Schools that plan to retain or augment curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have provided evidence that the implementation of that design has resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter.</p> <p>Schools that propose a material redesign to the curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a new charter have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the increased academic performance of children, and a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new curricular design. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Schools that seek to add grade levels not included in the approval of the original charter have presented an outline of the curriculum and specific assessment plans for the term of a future charter. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
--	---

Community Partnership Charter School proposes in its application for charter renewal to grow to a school serving 450 students in the Kindergarten through eighth grades over the term of a future charter.

In its application for charter renewal the school proposes to continue the use of the curriculum proposed in its original charter. As was reported when the school was initially recommended to receive a charter, the curriculum addresses New York State performance standards. The curriculum has been refined over the term of this charter and provides greater detail than in evidence at the time of initial chartering. As discussed above, the school has posted mixed results as it has implemented this curriculum during the term of its existing charter.

With its renewal application the school presented a refined curriculum designed to serve the middle grades it seeks to serve in the term of a future charter. While the refined middle school curriculum presented addresses state standards, the curricular web form does not provide the details that address the renewal visit team's concerns regarding expectations for the quality of student performance at the school. The school has not specifically enumerated the type and quality of student work the middle school program will demand to ensure that students reach state standards. While this is not a required component of a written curriculum, such completeness would afford the Institute the ability to analyze the school's future goals for the quality of student work as well as provide the school with a detailed and specific plan for what is demanded for student success. The school's challenge over the term of its existing charter continues to be the implementation of a consistent and rigorous instructional program that demands high quality student performance in the creation of work products. It is these products or

artifacts of student work that allow teachers, the Director, the Board, and the Beginning with Children Foundation to assess the strength of student progress toward meeting state standards in the months between standardized assessments.

There is no clear evidence that Community Partnership Charter School will be successful with older students as the school has not yet proven itself with the student community it currently has.

<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Accountability Plan</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school’s measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school’s proposed Accountability Plan follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.</p>
--	--

Community Partnership Charter School submitted a proposed Accountability Plan with its application for charter renewal. The plan largely follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and is reasonable, feasible, and achievable. Should the school’s charter be renewed by the State University of New York’s Board of Trustees, the Institute will work with the school to finalize this proposed Accountability Plan and incorporate it into a future charter.

The Accountability Plan, as submitted in the renewal application, is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State’s testing regimen or revisions to the Institute’s Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>School Calendar & Enrollment</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction. Additionally, the school has provided an enrollment plan outlining the grades and growth patterns it anticipates during the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
---	---

The school provided a sample calendar outlining the necessary school days and hours of instruction. The school day will continue to extend from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with enrichment support programs provided from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday mornings. The school also provided an enrollment plan that envisions growth from serving grades Kindergarten through fifth grade to serving Kindergarten through eighth grade in the term of a future charter. The school hopes to serve 450 students in the Kindergarten through eighth grades.

Benchmark 4D
Fiscal & Facility Plans

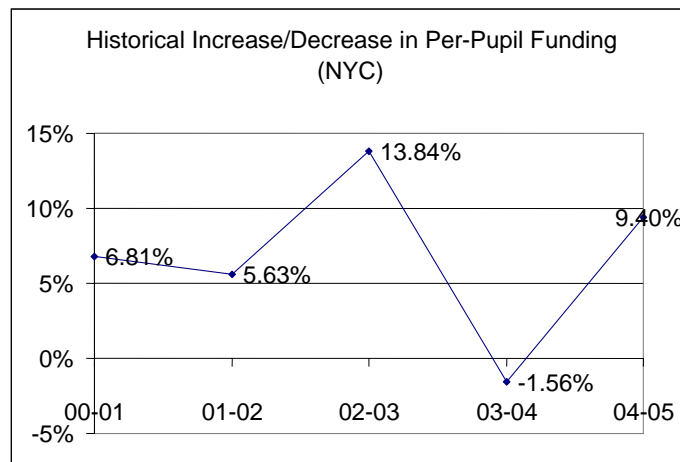
4D

The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.

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.

The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period. The plan relies on continued high demand for enrollment in the school. Also, extending the current facility arrangements with the DOE would be necessary. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. The school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts. The school's fiscal plan projects an increasingly strong financial position over the proposed renewal charter period and a decreased reliance on fundraising. A relatively high percentage of the school's five-year budgets are devoted to personnel costs (76 percent to 78 percent of revenues).

The school projects a three percent annual increase in per pupil revenue in its fiscal plan. While there is degree of uncertainty related to these projected increases, they are less than the historical average increase over the life of the school's charter (6.9 percent). The school's plan balances this by assuming student attrition of two percent per year and including a contingency budget line of \$100,000 per year. In addition, the school has established a track record of meeting its financial obligations including a period during which its per pupil revenue had declined from the previous year (2003-2004). Presented below is the per-pupil funding increases and decreases over the life of the school's charter.



Source: State Education Department

The fiscal plan anticipates that the school will need to raise a total of \$350,878 in the first two years of the proposed new charter. This amount is well within the demonstrated capacity of the school to fundraise. In the remaining years of the proposed new charter, no additional funds are anticipated to be raised. As represented in the renewal application, to the extent that annual fundraising goals cannot be met, the Board and the school's Director will make necessary and appropriate reductions in planned expenditures.