



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Amber Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2006-2007

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Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277, 518/427-6510, Fax
<http://www.newyorkcharters.org>

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INTRODUCTION

Background on Charter Schools and the State University

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts; schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees which is directly responsible for school performance. That board, while independent, is subject to public oversight. Just as traditional school boards, charter school boards of trustees must adhere to New York State’s Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools and their boards are also subject to oversight and monitoring. In the case of SUNY authorized schools, that monitoring is conducted by the Institute. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its Accountability Plan, as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness within the charter period, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

The State University Trustees’ Oversight Process

The State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education

Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan (which is contained in the schools' charter itself) and other methods.

In addition to monitoring a school's compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals.

The first goal is to facilitate improvement. By providing substantive information about the school's strengths and weaknesses to the school's board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school to recognize those strengths and weaknesses. Of course, whether the school actually takes corrective actions, and more importantly, effective corrective action, remains the school's responsibility given that it is an independent and autonomous school.

The second goal is to disseminate information about the school's performance beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. Ideally this information, including the present report, should help parents make choices about whether a school is serving their children well and/or is likely to continue to do so in the future. For this reason, this report (and others like it) is posted on the Institute's website and the school is asked to inform parents of its posting. By providing parents with more information, the State University hopes to enhance the market accountability to which charters are subject: if they do not attract and retain sufficient numbers of students who want the product they are providing, they cannot survive.

The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a database of the school's progress over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute is better able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school—and the likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute and the State University Trustees are better positioned to make recommendations and a decision on whether a school's charter should be renewed. In turn, a school will also have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

Inspection Visits and Reports¹

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. This inspection report is a product of one of those visits.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit ("the Renewal Benchmarks"). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

¹ More information on the Institute's school oversight and evaluation system may be found online at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsPubsReports.htm>.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. This subset, Renewal Benchmarks 1.B-1.F, is often referred to as the "Qualitative Education Benchmarks," or "QEBs." In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the QEBs are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's 3rd - 8th grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily limited and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.²

Over time, and particularly at the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1.A, the school's progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the Qualitative Education Benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

This inspection report includes a review of academic attainment and improvement based on the school's performance on state and other assessments. The School Performance Review provides an evaluation of the school's academic achievement in the context of Renewal Benchmark 1A. Because of the timing of the release of state assessment data, the review is based on test results from the school year preceding the date of the school visit upon which the evidence for the Qualitative Education Benchmarks is based.³ The narrative refers to School Performance Summaries which follow the School Performance Review section. These one page summaries present a synopsis of the Accountability Plan outcome measures in English language arts and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures over a three year time period.⁴

- Measure 1 (absolute) shows the grade level and aggregate performance on the state test of both all students and students enrolled in at least their second year.
- Measure 2 (absolute) presents the school's Performance Index (PI) measured against the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system. The PI is derived by adding together the percentage of students at Levels 2 and above and the percentage at Levels 3 and above.

² More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

³ Not all schools will have state test results because the state only administers tests in certain grades: state English language arts and mathematics tests are administered to grades 3-8, science tests in grades 4 and 8, and social studies tests in grades 5 and 8.

⁴ In indicating whether a performance measure has been met, the summaries only present a strict, narrow accounting; they do not show whether the school came close to meeting a measure or the relative weight of each measure for gauging student progress.

- Measure 3 (comparative) compares the performance of charter school students enrolled in at least their second year to all students in the same tested grades in the local school district. For instance, a grades 5-8 charter school would compare only its grades 6-8 results to the same tested grades in the district because students in its 5th grade were only in their first year at the charter school.
- Measure 4 (comparative) compares the actual overall performance of the school to the predicted level of performance of similar schools statewide using a regression analysis based on free lunch statistics. The Effect Size is a statistical measure calculated by dividing the difference between the actual and predicted outcomes by the standard deviation difference.
- Measure 5 (value added) shows both the number of grade level cohorts that achieved their target as well as the overall performance of all cohort students combined. If the baseline is above 50 NCE, then the target is an increase of any amount.

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and inspection report, which all schools in that position receive.

As such, each of the Institute's inspection reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school. This chart is set forth in the following section.

The Present Report

The information contained within this report is the result of evidence obtaining during the Institute's visit to the school conducted in the spring of the school's second year of instruction of its first or second charter term. In addition to this introduction, the report includes a brief description of the school, conclusions and analysis from the present visit, the Renewal Benchmarks, and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the school inspectors and the date of the visit.

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two- to four-member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute's evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment) and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety it may take additional and immediate action; however, monitoring

compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit. The same is true with issues pertaining to the fiscal soundness of the school. Evaluation visits typically include an interview with the school board, the school leader, classroom visitations, in addition to the review of other school-based documents.

Keeping this Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State University and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are valid, in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school's academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use the inspection team's conclusions in planning school improvement efforts.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the inspection team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the

school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the inspection team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed *brutal honesty* is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the charter for the Amber Charter School (“Amber”) on January 21, 2000, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on April 4, 2000. The school opened in September 2000 with an enrollment of 120 students in kindergarten and first grade, adding one grade per year through the 2005-06 school year, enrolling 354 students in grades kindergarten through six in 2006-07. Originally located on the second floor of a building located at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue in East Harlem, the school moved to its current location at 220 East 106th Street in Central Harlem, a former New York City Department of Education building, in the fall of 2002.

Since its founding, Amber has partnered with the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans. The Association has a strong community service history and education experience through its extensive role in the development and operation of the Twenty-first Century Academy for Community Leadership, a New York City public school. Amber had hoped to locate in a predominately Spanish-speaking area of New York City (Washington Heights), with the objective of enrolling a population that was one-half Spanish-language dominant and one-half English-language dominant. However, the board was unable to identify an appropriate facility in an area where such a mix of students could be enrolled. Initially, the school used a project-based, dual-language immersion curriculum, with the goal that all Amber students, both Spanish-language dominant and English-language dominant, would attain fluency in both languages. The school sustained the implementation of the immersion program for the first three years of its charter. In 2004, based on an analysis of student academic achievement, Amber requested and received an amendment to its charter, changing from a full immersion program to a modified immersion Spanish program, where students are instructed in Spanish for at least five hours each week.

Amber submitted an Application for Charter Renewal in 2004 and was granted a full-term five-year charter renewal by the State University Trustees on March 1, 2005. The Board of Regents approved the renewal charter on May 17, 2005. The State University Trustees included several conditions as part of the school’s renewal, including enrollment limitations and the authority to offer instruction in grades kindergarten through six only. The school is currently working on a facility expansion plan in which they hope to construct a new facility at Amsterdam Avenue and 172nd Street in Upper Manhattan that would serve as an “upper school” location, while continuing to provide instruction at the current facility to the “lower school” students. The school indicated in its Application for Charter Renewal its desire to continue adding upper grades, eventually offering a high school program.

The mission of the Amber Charter School as stated in the school’s Renewal Charter is as follows:

Amber Charter School’s mission is to provide comprehensive learning experiences that will enable all students to become fully-educated, creative adults, prepared to play leadership roles in New York City and in our global society.

Key design elements as outlined in the school’s Renewal Charter include:

- New York Standards-based core curriculum, including humanities, applied sciences and culture as set forth in the school’s mission;

- partnership and implementation of the Success for All academic program in grades five and six;
- interdisciplinary, thematic curricular units;
- the use of the Terra Nova assessment system, including multiple assessment instruments that include literacy and mathematics beginning in grade one;
- foreign language in the elementary and middle school programs to support second language learning beginning in kindergarten;
- two hour daily literacy block from second through fifth grades that includes 45 minutes of smaller group instruction in guided reading;
- 90 minutes of mathematics instruction daily through fifth grade;
- enriched instruction in the arts that includes student performance events;
- programs for struggling students, including Title I reading and mathematics assistance, a commitment to providing special education services through inclusion models, and remediation and enrichment programs;
- parental engagement through membership on the school’s board of trustees, school planning council, parents association and parent volunteers;
- project-based and experiential learning opportunities;
- maintaining and developing teacher leadership through participation in the board of trustees, curriculum, assessment, and hiring committees as well as the school planning council;
- technologically-sound learning environment; and
- school and classroom libraries.

School Year

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School Day

8:00 a.m. - 2:50 p.m.⁵

⁵ 8:00 a.m. to 8:25 is used as a breakfast period. Students in kindergarten and first grade are dismissed at 2:40 p.m.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment⁶	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2000-01	120	120	120	K-1	K-1	K-1	YES
2001-02	160	160	120	K-2	K-2	K-2	YES ⁷
2002-03	200	200	180	K-3	K-3	K-3	YES
2003-04	240	240	240	K-4	K-4	K-4	YES
2004-05	280	280	291	K-5	K-5	K-5	YES
2005-06	300	300	325	K-6	K-6	K-6	YES
2006-07	350	350	354	K-6	K-6	K-6	YES
2007-08	460			K-6			
2008-09	460			K-6			
2009-10	460			K-6			

⁶ Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2004-05 School Report Card, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch and student demographic figures are calculated, cited the following enrollment totals: 2002-03: 168; 2003-04: 234; 2004-05: 291 . The NYSED 2005-06 database cited an enrollment of 342 students.

⁷ The school was granted permission to reduce enrollment levels due to facility-related constraints at the original location at 125th Street and Lennox Ave.

Race/Ethnicity	2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Black (Not Hispanic)	151	89.9%	196	83.8%	247	84.9%	268	78.4%
Hispanic	17	10.1%	38	16.2%	44	15.1%	74	21.6%
White	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Source: NYSED 2004-05 Report Card (2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

Free/Reduced Lunch	2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	107	63.7%	163	69.7%	179	61.5%	243	71.1%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	27	16.1%	30	12.8%	30	10.3%	55	16.1%

Source: NYSED 2004-05 Report Card (2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter 1st Year	2000-01	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter; End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter 2 nd Year	2001-02	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter 3 rd Year	2002-03	3 rd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	School moved to current facility on 106 th Street
Original Charter 4 th Year	2003-04	4 th	NO		
Original Charter 5 th Year	2004-05	5 th	YES	Initial Renewal Report	Modified Spanish immersion program; Granted full charter renewal for period of five years
Renewal Charter 1 st Year	2005-06	6 th	NO		
Renewal Charter 2 nd Year	2006-07	7 th	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS EVALUATION VISIT

In February of 2005, Amber Charter School was granted a full-term five-year renewal with the condition that the school's authority be limited to providing instruction in kindergarten through sixth grade in each year of the charter. The school would have a maximum student population of 300 in the 2005-2006 school year, 350 in the 2006-2007 school year, and a maximum of 620 students every year thereafter for the remaining term of the charter. Prior to making this recommendation to the Trustees, the Charter Schools Institute conducted a renewal visit of the school in November, 2004. At that time, school inspectors observed classrooms, met with administrators and board members, and interviewed teachers. Based upon the totality of the school's record during its charter term, including evidence collected at the time of the visit, the Institute issued several findings in its report to the State University Trustees, the key points of which are summarized below.

Amber met some, though not all, of the measures of student academic performance in its Accountability Plan. Across all New York State assessments, Amber outperformed students enrolled in Community School District (CSD) 5, the district in which the school is located with passing rates ranging from 31 to 71 percent. Taken as a whole, the student achievement data for the first four years of operation indicated that the school had improved student learning and achievement over time.

At the time of the renewal visit, the school generally had effective systems and programs in place that provided 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. The school had developed a detailed curriculum aligned with state standards. Inspectors generally observed effective teaching in the lower grades with instructional strength less strong in the upper grades. The school had identified the need for a staff developer who would assist teachers in improving their construction and delivery of lessons.

In November 2004, the school had yet to create a scholarly environment of high academic expectations, and had not reliably fostered calm, productive classrooms at every grade level. Amber had, however, put in place a school-wide behavior management system that showed initial promise.

Over the course of the school's initial charter term, the school benefited from consistent governance and oversight from its board of trustees. The board was responsible for locating and renovating a suitable facility as well as maintaining the overall financial health of the school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the present visit to Amber Charter School on April 25, 2007. Inspectors visited classrooms, reviewed documents and interviewed instructional and administrative staff. Each of their conclusions is summarized below. The evidence base and further analysis is contained in the Benchmark Analysis and Evidence section.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

From the 2003-04 through 2005-06 school years, the school has shown improvement in English language arts and a decline in mathematics; in 2005-06 it was not achieving its goals in either subject. Based on limited data the school was coming close to meeting its goals in science and social studies, and had achieved its NCLB goal. The school also appears to have met, or come close to meetings, its goals for parent satisfaction, student engagement, legal compliance and fiscal soundness.

Assessment

The school's leadership has developed structures and systems to collect and organize a variety of assessment data. Evidence suggests that school leaders have utilized some of these systems to create student groupings and individualized assessment folders. However, evidence suggests that the school has yet to fully develop a program that trains and supports teachers to use data to inform their daily instruction.

Instructional Leadership

Evidence suggests that school initiatives sometimes lack follow-through and feedback loops to assess and ensure that initiatives were implemented effectively and targeted student performance and achievement.

Quality of Instruction

Across the school, the quality of instruction varied widely.

At-risk students

The school has identified and put into place multiple resources to aid students at risk of academic failure. Evidence suggests, however, that these resources have not been maximized to their fullest potential.

Professional Development

As was true in previous inspection visits, the school continues to lack a school-wide staff developer. Currently, the limited clinical supervision provided by the school staff has little likelihood of resulting in improvement of teacher practice across the school.

Governance

The school's board of trustees has created committees to more specifically attend to specialized school areas. Evidence suggests that the board's Education Committee was particularly active this year in implementing changes affecting Amber's academic program. It was unclear how the board planned to hold school administrators accountable for eventually assuming the management and effective implementation of these kinds of instructional leadership tasks.

PREVIOUS YEARS' SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The following review of academic attainment and improvement (Benchmark 1A) is based on assessment results and other data from the 2005-06 school year, although data is presented from the two previous years as well.

Summary: From the 2003-04 through 2005-06 school years, the school has shown improvement in English language arts and a decline in mathematics; in 2005-06 it was not achieving its goals in either subject. Based on limited data the school is was coming close to meeting its goals in science and social studies, and had achieved its NCLB goal. The school also appears to have met, or come close to meeting, its goals for parent satisfaction, student engagement, legal compliance and fiscal soundness.

English language arts: The school has shown steady improvement from 2003-04 through 2005-06, with 35 percent of 4th grade students proficient on the state English language arts exam in 2003-04 and 50 percent in 2004-05. In 2005-06, when testing in grades 3-6 was implemented, 57 percent of those students scored at the proficient level. The school has achieved the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system for each school year from 2003-04 through 2005-06. The school has also outperformed the local school district for each of these years. However, in 2004-05 in comparison to similar schools statewide the school performed worse than predicted. However, in 2005-06 it performed about the same as predicted, although this still did not meet the target of this comparative measure. On the value added measure, two out of five cohorts achieved their targets in 2005-06; therefore, the school did not meet this measure.

Mathematics: The school's performance in mathematics declined from 2003-04 through 2005-06. In 2003-04 on the state 4th grade exam 71 percent were proficient; 65 percent were at this level in 2004-05. In 2005-06, 46 percent of students in grades 3-6 were proficient. The school has achieved the AMO for each of these three years. It did outperform the local school district in 2003-04 but did not do so in 2004-05 or 2005-06. In comparison to similar schools statewide the school performed considerably worse than predicted in 2004-05 and 2005-06. On its value added measure, two out of five cohorts achieved their targets in 2005-06; therefore, the school did not meet this measure.

Science: On the 4th grade state science exam in 2005-06, 71 percent of students scored at the proficient level, a decline from the previous year's 76 percent. Comparison results with the local school district were reported unavailable. On the Terra Nova, grades 2, 3 and 4 all experienced spring to spring gains in 2005-06, but only grade 2 exceeded grade level (50 NCE).

Social Studies: On the 5th grade state social studies exam in 2005-06, 72 percent of students scored at the proficient level, an increase from the previous year's 56 percent. Comparison results with the local school district were reported unavailable. On the Terra Nova, grades 2-4 all showed spring to spring gains in 2005-06 although only grade 2 exceeded grade level. Grade 5 declined from 42 NCE to 42.

No Child Left Behind: The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state's NCLB Accountability system.

Optional Goals: The school came very close to meeting its Satisfaction and Engagement goals in 2005-06. The school had a 100 percent response rate on its parent survey and satisfaction was high; moreover, it had increased from the previous year. The school came close to achieving its target for participation in parent-teacher conferences (85 percent) in 2005-06 as well. In addition, the daily attendance rate of 90 percent was below the target of 95 percent in 2005-06. The school also reported achieving its goals in Legal Compliance and Fiscal Soundness.

Note: The following two pages present School Performance Summaries that provide data addressing the required Accountability Plan outcome measures for English language arts and mathematics and the school's performance against these measures. Please refer to the "Inspection Visits and Reports" section of the Introduction of this report for full definitions of the measures used and details about the tables themselves.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

English Language Arts
Amber Charter School



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

	2003-04 Grades Served: K-4			MET	2004-05 Grades Served: K-5			MET	2005-06 Grades Served: K-6			MET
	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	AMO		All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	AMO		All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	AMO	
1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4	35.3 (17)	35.3 (17)	NO	4	50.0 (58)	50.0 (54)	NO	3	70.3 (37)	79.3 (29)	
	8	(0)	(0)		8	(0)	(0)		4	42.9 (28)	50.0 (26)	
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	4	124	123	YES	4	147	131	YES	5	47.9 (48)	50.0 (28)	
	8		107		8		116		6	33.3 (12)	33.3 (12)	
3. Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local district.	4	35.3	31.7	YES	4	50.0	38.8	YES	7	(0)	(0)	
	8				8				8	(0)	(0)	
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3).	Comparison: (Manhattan District 5): Grades School District			YES	Comparison: (Manhattan District 5): Grades School District			NO	Comparison: (Manhattan District 5): Grades School District			YES
	Effect Size	Actual	Predicted		Effect Size	Actual	Predicted		Effect Size	Actual	Predicted	
	4	50.0	59.5	-0.54	NO	125	52	50.7	0.07	NO		
VALUE ADDED MEASURE												
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam.	Assessment: Terra Nova			NO	Assessment: Terra Nova			NO	Assessment: Terra Nova			NO
	Grades Cohorts Making Target:	2-4	of		Grades Cohorts Making Target:	2-5	of		Grades Cohorts Making Target:	2-6	2 of 5	
	N	Base	Target	Result	N	Base	Target	Result	N	Base	Target	Result

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Mathematics
Amber Charter School



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

	2003-04		MET	2004-05		MET	2005-06		MET
	Grades Served: K-4			Grades Served: K-5			Grades Served: K-6		
ABSOLUTE MEASURES	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	NO	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	NO	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	NO
	1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam.	4 70.6 (17)		4 70.6 (17)	NO		4 62.8 (59)	4 64.8 (54)	
2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system.	Grades	AMO	YES	Grades	AMO	YES	Grades	AMO	YES
	4 165	136		4 164	142		3-6 131	86	
COMPARATIVE MEASURES	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)		YES	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)		NO	Comparison: (Manhattan District 4)		NO
	Grades	School		District	Grades		School	District	
3. Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in the local district.	4 70.6	4 54.7	YES	4 64.8	4 68.0	NO	3-6 45.9	3-6 49.5	NO
4. Each year the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3).	Assessment: TERRA NOVA		NO	Effect Size		NO	Effect Size		NO
	Grades	Cohorts Making Target		Grades	Actual		Predicted	N	
VALUE ADDED MEASURE	Assessment: TERRA NOVA		NO	Assessment: TERRA NOVA		NO	Assessment: TERRA NOVA		NO
	Grades	Cohorts Making Target		Grades	Cohorts Making Target		Grades	Cohorts Making Target	
5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 50 NCE on a norm referenced test or 75 percent proficient on the state exam.	2-4	of	NO	2-5	of	NO	2-6	2 of 5	NO
	N	Base Target Result		N	Base Target Result		N	Base Target Result	

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Assessment

The school's leadership has developed structures and systems to collect and organize a variety of assessment data. Evidence suggests that the school's leaders have utilized some of these systems to create student groupings. For example, the school's Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) stated that the school uses the results of the state tests, Terra Nova, and Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) to identify students in need of Title 1 support. Additionally, some teachers reported using DRA assessments throughout the year to determine reading groups.

Teachers have also received some support in utilizing data to inform instruction. A review of professional development offerings during the 2006-07 school year revealed that teachers engaged in activities related to analyzing assessment results on October 6, 2006, and February 2, 2007. These offerings trained teachers how to organize and interpret assessment data results. It appeared, at the time of the evaluation visit, that teachers had not yet received training in how to utilize student data to drive instructional decisions.

Similarly, although the school had developed an individual assessment folder system to track students' performance on external exams, teachers had not yet been trained in utilizing the data in these folders to inform instruction. The school staff told the inspectors that they developed and completed individual assessment folders for each student close to the time of the school visit. These folders contained external assessment results from the previous year, including Terra Nova, state English language arts and mathematics results, and practice state tests. At the time of the visit, the assessment folder system had not yet been fully implemented in the school. The head-of-school acknowledged the need to do more teacher training and support in using the assessment folders. One teacher stated, "I believe that assessment needs to drive instruction...but I don't know how to use the folders to drive instruction." With additional professional development, teachers could begin to utilize the folder system to inform their day-to-day instruction toward improving student achievement.

Instructional Leadership

Evidence suggested that school initiatives sometimes lacked follow-through and feedback loops to assess and ensure that initiatives were implemented effectively and that they targeted student performance and achievement. For example, in grades 1-2 and 3-4, the school's administration arranged "bridge classes" which mix high achieving students from the lower of the two grades and lower students from the higher of the two grades. The director of curriculum and instruction noted that high achieving students were identified using the DRA and Terra Nova scores and teacher recommendations. However, both the director and several teachers reported that the decision to schedule bridge classes was based on student enrollment rather than a strategic decision to meet students' learning needs. It was also unclear what would happen to the advanced students in bridge classes next year. Some staff members said that the advanced students would not repeat, but would rather continue "bridging" the grades. Other staff speculated that the advanced students would repeat a grade. Several teachers and the director remarked that "really it all depends on enrollment." Although the director of curriculum and instruction carefully chose students to "advance" in the bridge class, was not clear that the school had supported the bridge teachers in teaching these students, nor was it apparent how the school has planned to support these students as they matriculate to the next grade level.

Quality of Instruction

In both upper and lower grades, students seemed well-behaved and orderly. However, across the school, the quality of instruction varied widely. In general, the teachers did not employ a range of strategies that would engage students with varied learning styles, and did not pause to assess student learning in a formative way or check for understanding. In one class, students spent most of the time writing down notes rather than grappling with understanding the content. In another class, the teacher moved quickly through the lesson without providing much opportunity for student interaction. The teacher did not effectively gauge student mastery of the content using informal assessment strategies like questioning students for understanding, but rather moved along using the packaged curriculum lesson. The teacher did not deviate from the lesson to extend the conversation beyond factual understanding and into higher order thinking practices. In contrast, inspectors noted that in several classrooms, teachers engaged students in lively conversations about the content material and informally assessed student learning towards clear objectives. For example, during a mathematics lesson students and their teacher investigated ways to determine the surface area of rectangles. The task for students to complete was to determine rectangular size by piecing together known-sized shapes on construction paper. Students then presented and discussed strategies they used in completing their task. Although inspectors noted that a few teachers, like the one above, taught a successful and effective lesson, many novice level teachers would benefit from targeted coaching and professional development to refine and improve their teaching skills.

In February 2007, sixth grade students' schedules and classrooms were changed from a self-contained elementary structure to a middle school structure where students rotated among specialized teachers. At the time of the evaluation visit, on a weekly basis, students received 14 blocks of instruction in English language arts, 8 blocks of instruction in mathematics, and 3 blocks each of science and social studies. On Fridays after lunch, there was a thirty-five minute period for student test preparation and clubs. While teachers, administrators, and board members talked favorably about the change to a middle school structure, it reportedly created some additional challenges for the sixth grade. Teachers indicated that, due to the shift from self-contained classrooms to a content-based model, students were not all in the same place in terms of content covered. Given that the sixth grade students have test scores significantly lower than those of the rest of the school, the visit team questions whether students will be prepared for the state exams. Although the school's director of curriculum and instruction and the Title I teacher stated that the sixth grade would benefit from their support, both said their priorities were to focus on the school's lower grades. With few support structures, it would appear that sixth grade teachers are on their own to plan and support each other. It is therefore unclear how, if at all, the school leadership is demonstrating that they are "extremely concerned about the instructional program and teaching at the upper grades" (Amber Charter School Accountability Plan Progress Report, p. 18).

At-Risk Students

The school has identified and put into place multiple resources to aid students at risk of academic failure. These resources include staff and structures to support special education students. In addition, for general education students at risk of academic failure, the school has provided extra adult staffing (e.g., Title I teacher, teaching assistants, and tutors), and has scheduled additional instructional time (e.g., through schedule adjustments during the day, providing an after-school program and Saturday program). Evidence suggests, however, that these resources have not been maximized to their fullest potential.

The school had 29 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Special education students at Amber are served through an inclusion model. It was not clear, however, when and how paraprofessionals, and regular and special education teachers collaborated about supporting special education students. As the school matures, ongoing attention should be directed at ensuring the seamless provision of programs and services to students with disabilities who have been identified by the Committee on Special Education (CSE).

Services provided to improve the skills of students performing at Levels 1 and 2 on the state exam seemed disproportionate across the school grades. For grades one through three, a certified Title I teacher provided student support for 30 first graders, 20 second graders, 12 kindergarten students, and 5 third graders. In grades three through six, uncertified tutors provided support to lower performing students. The head of school stated that the goal of having tutors in the classroom was to provide smaller learning groups for students with more adults attending to fewer students. The classroom tutors shadowed four to five students from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every day. While the extra staffing within the upper grade classrooms decreased the adult-student ratio, it was not evident that the school provided consistent training, or clear roles and expectations for tutors. For example, many teachers stated that they were unclear about the role of tutors in their classroom, and a few teachers reported that tutors sometimes engaged in non-instructional tasks like lunch duty, administering assessments or creating assessment folders. Some teachers also reported that they were unsure who supervised, trained and directed tutors in their work.

This limited evidence suggests that the school's academic program may benefit from putting in place an evaluative process for determining the effectiveness of the training and implementation of tutors toward improving the quality of instruction across classrooms. Despite his acknowledging the expense of the program (\$40,000 to \$50,000), the head of school did not appear to have a clear plan to assess the effectiveness of the tutoring program. When asked how effective the strategy had been this year, the head of school stated, "Time will tell how successful it is," and "There is no way of ensuring that tutors or any remediation will work." These statements suggest that the head of school does not have in place a mechanism for ongoing assessment and evaluation of remediation programs, including the tutoring program.

The school, in collaboration with the Community Association for Progressive Dominicans, Inc. (ACDP), provides an after-school tutoring program for students who are struggling academically. The school's director of curriculum and instruction said that the after-school program had recently been modified to emphasize academics. A new director, who was also an employee of the school, was hired to facilitate the program. Given the short duration of the inspection visit, inspectors were unable to attend or observe the after-school program in action. However, limited data from interviews suggests that teachers do not view the after-school program as supporting the academic program. Few teachers said they relied on the after-school tutoring program to support struggling students, and in fact teachers from both upper and lower grades said they thought the program was more suited to other grade levels. One upper grade teacher, for example, said that the after-school program did not serve upper grade students very well. As a result, the teacher said upper grade teachers had proposed providing homework help for students from 3:00 to 4:00 P.M. In contrast, a lower elementary teacher reported that after school tutoring seemed, "more for upper grades and is really about homework help." A parent of a kindergarten student said that the after-school program, recommended to her because her child was struggling in school, requires a long day that "is intense for a [younger] child who is struggling." At the time of the evaluation visit, the school board's Education Committee had identified the after-school program as needing additional improvement measures.

Professional Development

As was true at the time of the 2005 renewal visit, the school continues to lack a staff position dedicated to improving teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge. According to the head of school, an assistant director of curriculum was hired to focus on parental concerns and student discipline. This position was intended to provide the director of curriculum and instruction with more time to spend coaching teachers. At the time of the evaluation visit, the director of curriculum and instruction stated that most of her newly freed time was spent in the kindergarten, first and second grade classrooms because “these are the foundation building” grades. In addition, she said that there were several new teachers in the lower grades struggling to maintain order in the classroom and to deliver instruction. Teachers in the lower grades did name the director of curriculum and instruction as someone who helps them become better teachers. However, evidence suggests a need for a staff developer /instructional leader in the upper grades for areas such as instructional planning and delivery. This absence of a school-wide staff developer is not something new to the school, as it was noted in the 2005 renewal report: “...The school has rightly determined the need for a staff developer who would assist teachers in improving their construction and delivery of lessons” (Renewal report, finding 4, “Is the school an Academic Success? p. 11). It does not appear that the school board has fully followed through with its 2004 goal of hiring school leadership with expertise to “coach, develop, guide, and evaluate Amber’s teaching staff” (Renewal report, p. 12). Teachers, on the whole, did report that the consultant from Lehman College, who periodically visits the school, has been extremely helpful in providing instructional strategies and recommendations for implementing writing in their classrooms.

A review of documentation at two selected grade levels provided evidence that the director of curriculum and instruction had completed two to three informal observations for teachers. Documentation of informal observations of these teachers suggested that the director of curriculum and instruction provides clear, detailed feedback, including recommendations for future practice. However, teachers suggested that documented feedback is not linked to further coaching or professional development. The limited clinical supervision provided by the school staff has little likelihood of resulting in improvement of teacher practice.

The school adopted Success for All (SFA) to support the middle school English language arts curriculum. However, despite this adoption, few teachers had been trained and supported in using SFA. The “expert” teacher received two days of training several summers ago, and although teachers said they had a consultant to help support them last year, they had not received any training or feedback during the 2006-07 school year. In addition, the forty-five minute scheduled block allotted to teach SFA falls short of the time required by the program design. As a result, teachers had to “pick and choose” what to cover. Several staff members questioned the overall effectiveness of SFA, and it was not clear how, if at all, the school evaluated the sufficiency of teachers’ training in or effectiveness of implementing the SFA program.

Governance

At the suggestion of a school consultant, during the 2006-07 school year the board created subcommittees to more specifically attend to specialized school areas. The subcommittees include: finance, facilities, education, fundraising, governance, and executive. The board noted that this committee structure enabled members to focus their energy and expertise in a systematic way.

Inspectors noted that the board’s Education Committee was particularly active this past school year in implementing changes affecting Amber’s academic program. Changes initiated by the committee

included: adjusting administrative organization schedules to free more time for the director of curriculum and instruction to devote to instructional issues, hiring classroom tutors for grades three through six, and developing individual assessment data analysis folders for each classroom in each grade. The board noted that these and other reforms have helped to sharpen an “individualized learning focus” at the school which aimed to increase student learning and performance on external exams. In-class tutors, for example, helped individual students who most needed academic support, and the individual assessment data folders documented individual students’ areas of academic strength and weaknesses. While the focus on individual student progress is laudable, it was not clear how the school board or its Education Committee planned to assess the overall strength or quality of these and other programmatic initiatives. More importantly, it was not clear how the board planned to hold school administrators accountable for eventually assuming the management and effective implementation of these kinds of instructional leadership tasks. Although school board members stated that they had acquired an evaluation protocol for the head of school, they did not have the protocol on hand for inspectors to examine.

APPENDIX: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?	
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1	English language arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English language arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.2	Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.3	Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.4	Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.5	NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data	1B	The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.
Benchmark 1C Curriculum	1C	The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

Benchmark 1D Pedagogy	1D.1	The school has strong instructional leadership.
	1D.2	High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.
	1D.3	The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?	
Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals.

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second Year Visit at Amber Charter School on April 27, 2007. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Susan Seymour (Team Leader) is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

Dr. Joanne Falinski, Ph.D., is the Vice President for Charter School Evaluation at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. She most recently served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Pace University, Pleasantville, NY. Her responsibilities included teaching both undergraduate and graduate education courses, supervising literacy practicum students in the field and conducting relevant research. She also presented at numerous regional and national conferences on topics of literacy, professional development and collaboration between special education and regular education. Dr. Falinski was actively involved in the University community, serving as a member of the Institutional Review Board and Writing Center Advisory Board. Prior to joining Pace, Dr. Falinski served as an Assistant Professor in the School of Education for Manhattanville College and Director of a NYS site of the National Writing Project. Dr. Falinski's vast experience in the K-12 community includes serving as an Elementary Classroom Teacher and Elementary Principal.

Jason L. Sarsfield is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Mr. Sarsfield fulfills a leadership role in informal and annual visits to SUNY authorized charter schools as well as participates in the charter renewal review process, provides technical assistance to schools as needed, and contributes to the Institute's research agenda. Prior to joining the Institute in January, 2007 Mr. Sarsfield was a Contract Analyst at The Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University – Office of Academic Accountability where he was responsible for evaluating the academic performance of authorized schools, reviewing school curricula and educational program, and measuring progress toward educational goals. While at Central Michigan University, Mr. Sarsfield worked closely with the Michigan Department of Education on annual legislative reports, grant reviews, and policy recommendations. Previously, Mr. Sarsfield taught social studies in grades 7-12 in Michigan and Alaska while also completing curriculum development responsibilities and serving as an Advanced Placement Exam Reader for The College Board. Mr. Sarsfield holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan University and is completing the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.

Simeon Stolzberg is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Part of the Institute's oversight and evaluation team, Mr. Stolzberg participates in informal, annual and renewal school visits. Mr. Stolzberg also assists in the development and execution of the Institute's research agenda, performing statistical analyses of student academic data, and providing

technical guidance to schools as needed. Prior to joining the Institute, Mr. Stolzberg managed his own consulting practice, advising charter schools across the country in their application and planning phases. He also served as Middle School Director for the Beginning with Children Charter School in Brooklyn, New York. In 2002, as a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Mr. Stolzberg wrote the prospectus and application for the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BArT) in Massachusetts; the school was one of only five schools approved by the state that year. Mr. Stolzberg served as the school's founding principal. Mr. Stolzberg received his Master's Degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, with independent studies in education and political economy, from Williams College.

Kim Wechtenhiser was promoted to Associate Vice President at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York in August of 2006. Ms. Wechtenhiser will maintain primary responsibility for the Institute's charter renewal process; overseeing a comprehensive evaluation of each SUNY authorized charter school as it comes up for renewal. Ms. Wechtenhiser joined the Institute in September 2005 as a Senior Analyst. Prior to her work with the Institute, Ms. Wechtenhiser served as the Coordinator of New Schools Development in the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts Department of Education, where she led the review of new charter school applications, provided technical assistance to newly chartered schools, participated in the ongoing review of their academic and organizational performance, and oversaw the charter amendment process. Ms. Wechtenhiser is the former Lead Teacher of Spanish at City on a Hill Charter Public School in Boston, where she also served as faculty representative to the school's Board of Trustees. She taught Spanish at Westfield Public High School and English at the Universidad de Córdoba in Spain. Ms. Wechtenhiser holds a B.A. in Spanish and Secondary Education and a M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature, both from Simmons College. She earned an Ed.M. in School Leadership from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

In addition, the Institute was pleased to have the following consultant(s) join the school visit team:

Corinne McKamey, Ed.D., (Consulting Writer) has experiences across many facets of education. For the past 15 years, she has worked in a variety of roles in urban public schools, including science teacher; curriculum developer; school developer; teacher educator; and school evaluator. As a teacher education clinical faculty member at Trinity and Harvard Universities, she has served as a mentor teacher, university supervisor, and curriculum developer. Corinne has also been a research assistant for several university research projects, including Project ASSERT (Assessing Strengths and Supporting Affective Resistance in Teaching), and Harvard PACE (Projects in Active Cultural Engagement). She was a co-chair of the Harvard Educational Review, and has published several articles and a book entitled, *To be a teacher: Voices from the classroom* (1995). Her dissertation focused on aspects of caring learning communities in a high school serving a diverse immigrant population. Dr. McKamey received a Bachelor of Science degree from Cornell University, and a Doctor of Education degree from Harvard University.