



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

**Addendum Regarding the Renewal Report of
the International Charter School of Schenectaday**

March 20, 2007

Pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees*, the Charter Schools Institute finalized its Renewal Report regarding the International Charter School of Schenectady (ICSS) on March 9, 2007. The report included the Institute's renewal recommendation for a short-term renewal of three years with conditions for consideration by the SUNY Board of Trustees' Committee on Charter Schools at its scheduled meeting on March 16, 2007. The Institute's renewal recommendation was based on the totality of evidence presented by the school in its application for renewal, the renewal site visit conducted by the Institute, and the school's organizational, fiscal and academic record, which included the school's continued management by SABIS Educational Systems Inc. (SABIS).

Subsequent to the finalization of the report, and just prior to the Committee's meeting, ICSS announced that it planned to sever its contractual relationship with SABIS Educational Systems Inc.

In consideration of this development and upon review of the Institute's existing Renewal Report, members of the Committee charged the Institute with immediately obtaining additional information from ICSS, and reviewing and revising its recommendation as necessary to allow the school to craft and institute a comprehensive plan regarding the future of the school absent SABIS.

The Institute requested and received additional information from ICSS regarding the steps the school board had taken to date regarding the transition from management by SABIS to what will likely be self-management by the school. Upon review of this information and in light of its discussions with the Committee, the Institute revised its recommendation to reflect a one year renewal (through and including July 31, 2008) with conditions.

This recommendation was supported unanimously by the Committee on Charter Schools and, subsequently, by vote of the full SUNY Board of Trustees, both on March 20, 2007. Attached hereto is a copy of the resolution detailing the final renewal recommendation adopted by the SUNY Board of Trustees along with the Institute's final renewal report.

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MEMORANDUM

March 20, 2007

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Edward F. Cox, Co-Chair, Charter Schools Committee;
Randy A. Daniels, Co-Chair, Charter Schools Committee

SUBJECT: Application of International Charter School of
Schenectady for Charter Renewal

We recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Whereas the Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute"), acting on behalf and at the direction of the Board of Trustees in its capacity as a charter entity under the New York Charter Schools Act, conducted a thorough analysis of the application of the International Charter School of Schenectady (the "School") located in Rotterdam for charter renewal (the "Renewal Application") (copies on file in the offices of the Institute) consistent with the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the "State University Renewal Practices"); and

Whereas the Institute's renewal report (the "Renewal Report") that was provided to the Board of Trustees (copies on file in the Office of the Secretary and offices of the Institute) and recommendation were based on the School being managed by SABIS Educational Systems, Inc., upon with which the School recently provided notice of contract termination; and

Whereas the Institute, after conferring with members of the Committee on Charter Schools, now recommends that the Board of Trustees exercise discretion and renew the School's charter through and including July 31, 2008 with conditions as follows: (1) instruction shall be in grades Kindergarten through eighth only; (2) maximum enrollment shall be 750 students; and (3) after the School develops and advances its plans for management and educational program changes, the School will be eligible to apply for a short-term renewal of no less than two, nor more than four, years; now, therefore, be it:

Resolved that the Renewal Application should be approved and the School's charter renewed for one year subject to the above conditions; and be it further

Resolved that (1) the School as described in the Renewal Application meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable laws, rules and regulations, (2) the School has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner, and (3) so approving the Renewal Application and renewing the charter, as limited and restricted, is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in subdivision 2850(2) of the Education Law; and be it further

Resolved that the Renewal Application, as limited and restricted, be and hereby is, approved and the charter, as limited and restricted, be, and hereby is, renewed through and including July 31, 2008; and be it further

Resolved that the Institute, acting for the Board of Trustees, be, and hereby is, (1) directed to (a) enter into a proposed renewal charter with the School in accordance with this Resolution, which proposed renewal charter shall include such assurances and terms as the Institute shall deem necessary and appropriate, and (b) thereafter to submit the proposed charter to the Board of Regents for action consistent therewith, and (2) authorized to take appropriate action to implement the renewal conditions set forth in this Resolution.

BACKGROUND

The Board of Trustees is authorized under the Charter Schools Act (Education Law subdivision 2851(4)) to enter into a renewal charter agreement for a term of up to five years with each charter school whose renewal application the Board approves. The charter of the International Charter School of Schenectady (the "School") will expire on April 4, 2007. Pursuant to *the Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the "State University Renewal Practices") (last amended on December 13, 2005 and on file in the offices of the Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute")), the Institute conducted a renewal site visit, a review of the information in the renewal application and other relevant information, and produced a renewal report that recommended a three year short-term renewal for the School.

However, just prior to the March 16th briefing of the Committee on Charter Schools (the "Committee"), the School took steps to sever ties with its management company. As a result, members of the Committee directed the Institute to inquire of the School regarding its plans for the future and review its recommendation. Based on the information received from the School, the Institute recommends a one year renewal with conditions. In this circumstance, the School will be eligible to seek a short-term renewal upon presenting adequate

revisions to the management and educational program of the school as determined by the Institute.

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Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Renewal Report:

**International Charter School
of Schenectady**

March 9, 2007

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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 independent 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 them in carrying out 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. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the “Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees” (the “State University Renewal Practices”).² More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. There is no limitation upon the number of times that a charter may be renewed. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application, whether such application be for an initial renewal or any subsequent renewals:

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

²The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

- 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 (“Required 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 approves a renewal application, it is 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 the proposed charter or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents’ comments and recommendation(s). In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the current 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; as above, it will become operational upon expiration of the current charter.⁷

Process for Initial Renewals

While the initial 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.

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

⁴ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute’s website. See www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.

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.

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) 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 and to provide feedback to the school on the Institute’s conclusions. 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 identifies 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 school visit to look specifically at the strength of the school’s program and the evidence it is accumulating to support the school’s case for renewal. The number, breadth and scope of visits that the Institute conducts depend primarily on the school’s performance on standardized assessments

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

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school an effective, viable organization?
3. Is the school fiscally sound?
4. What are the school’s plans for the term of the next charter and are they reasonable, feasible and achievable?

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 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

⁸ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

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, the leader 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. Renewal visit team members conduct a variety of activities to get a sense of the educational program and determine if there are material deficiencies. These activities include: visiting classes, observing lessons, examining student work and other documents, observing school meetings, interviewing staff members and speaking 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 *Qualitative Education Benchmarks*, often referred to as the "Renewal 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 team members' completed benchmark comments 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, as well as a preliminary recommendation.

The following renewal outcomes are available to schools that are in their first charter period.¹¹ Each outcome contains specific criteria that a school must meet in order to be eligible for that outcome. These criteria are keyed to one or more of the Required Findings. In addition to any specific criteria set forth in a particular outcome, a school, to be eligible for any type of renewal, must be able to provide evidence that permits the State University to make *each* of the Required Findings:

- *Early Renewal*: available to a school that after three years of operation has accumulated three years of data in multiple grades on all or nearly all of the standardized assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan and for the last two years has met or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals based on its performance on those measures. In addition, the State University must find that the educational program, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is sound and effective. Early Renewal will be for a full-term of five years only.

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

¹¹ A school that is awarded a Short-Term Planning Year Renewal is still considered a school in its initial charter period when it comes again to renewal in its fifth full year of operation.

- *Short-Term Planning Year Renewal:* available to a school that has taken one or more planning years and has yet to be renewed. The renewal term will be equal in length to the number of planning years the school has taken. The State University must be able to determine that the educational program will be sound during the next charter period based on the available outcomes on the standardized assessment measures and any data available as gathered using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks.
- *Full-Term Renewal:* available to a school in its fifth year, Full-Term Renewal is for the maximum term of five years. In order for a school to be eligible for Full-Term Renewal, a school must at the time of renewal either (a) have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is effective or (b) made strong overall progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is particularly strong and effective.
- *Renewal with Conditions:* available to a school that (a) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term Renewal as regards its educational program, but that has material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that cannot be fully corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to making each and every other required finding, or (b) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term renewal as regards some portion of its educational program, but requires conditions to improve the academic program. Such conditions may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on the number of students and grades served. Conditions may also be imposed that are consonant with the requirements of NCLB as to schools requiring corrective action. Where appropriate, conditions may be imposed which if not met by the school shall be deemed a substantial and material violation of the school's charter and therefore expose the school to probation or charter revocation.
- *Short-Term Renewal:* available to a school in its fifth year that (a) has compiled an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement as measured by the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, but that has in place and in operation at the time of the renewal review an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, that will likely result in the school's being able to meet or come close to meeting those goals with the additional time that renewal would permit or (b) has compiled an overall record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals but that at the time of the renewal visit, has in place an educational program that, based on its assessment pursuant to the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is inadequate in multiple and material respects. Typically, but not always, Short-Term Renewal will be for two years. Short-Term Renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to educational, organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring Renewal:* available to a school that does not meet the standards for any type of renewal but which submits plans to the Board of Trustees for a restructuring of the school that legally commits the school to implementing a wholesale restructuring of

the education corporation, including, but not necessarily limited to, a new board of trustees, administrative team, academic program, organizational structure, and such plans, if implemented, would lead to the school likely meeting its standardized assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan during the next charter period. Whether to permit a school to submit an application for a Restructuring Renewal is at the discretion of the State University.

- *Non-Renewal:* where a school does not present a case for any kind of renewal, the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

Upon receiving a school's comments on the draft report, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and renders its findings and recommendations in their final form. The report is then transmitted to the Committee on Charter Schools of the Board of Trustees, the other members of the Board of Trustees and the school itself. This report is the product of that process.

READER'S GUIDE

This renewal report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Recommendations and Executive Summary, and 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.

Recommendations and Executive Summary

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.*, 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.

In addition to discussing the recommendations themselves (and any conditions made part of those recommendations), the executive summary also discusses 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.

Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmark section contains the renewal benchmarks that the Institute uses in initial renewals, together with a review of the pertinent evidence gathered during the renewal process.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The International Charter School of Schenectady (ICSS) was approved by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York in January of 2000. The Board of Regents subsequently issued a charter to the school on April 4, 2000. Facility related setbacks delayed the school's opening for two years, which served as planning years. Upon opening in September 2002 the school enrolled 267 students from Kindergarten through 4th grade. The school proceeded to add an additional grade level in each of the final two years of their initial charter, with a total enrollment of 478 in 2004-2005 from Kindergarten through 6th grade. The Board of Trustees approved a short-term planning year renewal on January 25, 2005 for a period of two years. The school was granted approval to continue expanding grade ranges during the short-term planning year renewal period, with a total enrollment in of 693 in 2006-2007 from Kindergarten through 8th grade. ICSS is currently completing its fifth full year of instruction.

In December 2005 the school purchased a facility located at 901 Draper Avenue in Rotterdam, New York, which is adjacent to Schenectady and is located less than half a mile from the school's first leased location on Eleanor Street in Schenectady. By March 2005 all instruction was taking place at the new facility, which lies only a few feet from the Schenectady City School District line.

The school's board of trustees employs SABIS Educational Systems, Inc. (SABIS) as its management partner. SABIS is a private, Minnesota-based service provider with an independent educational program¹².

The International Charter School of Schenectady's mission statement is as follows:

The International Charter School of Schenectady will be recognized as a provider of top quality education to a highly diverse student body. It will prepare all students for success in college, equip them with the ability and desire for life-long learning, and strengthen their civic, ethical, and moral values. The School will maintain high standards of efficiency and accountability throughout its operation.

Key design elements of the school's program, as outlined in the school's initial application for renewal, include:

- A highly structured, internationally oriented curriculum in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and world languages aligned to the New York State's Learning Standards;
- A hierarchy of subjects, with priority placed on English and mathematics, followed by a second language (Spanish);
- Defined skills and knowledge which all students must master, broken down further into "essential concepts";
- An emphasis on college preparation;
- An Academic Monitoring System, consisting of near weekly system-wide computer-scored assessments in grade three and above intended to identify learning gaps and facilitate supplemental tutoring;

¹² Details of the SABIS program are fully set forth in the school's charter application on file with the Institute.

- A Student Life program, designed to foster team-work, respect, and responsibility; and
- Utilization of a “point system” in which teachers monitor written demonstration of learning objectives and essential skills before moving on to additional concepts.

School Year (2006-2007)

180 days for all grades

School Day (2006-2007)

8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (7:45 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. is used as breakfast and arrival time)

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment¹³	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2000-01	Planning Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	YES
2001-02	Planning Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	YES
2002-03	300	300	300	K-4	K-4	K-4	YES
2003-04	425	425	425	K-5	K-5	K-5	YES
2004-05	550	550	550	K-6	K-6	K-6	YES
2005-06	610	610	610	K-7	K-7	K-7	YES
2006-07	724	724	724	K-8	K-8	K-8	YES

¹³ Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the SED 2004-2005 Report card, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated cited the following slightly different enrollment numbers: 2002-2003: 271; 2003-2004: 412; 2004-2005: 478. The SED database file also indicated a 2005-2006 enrollment of 592.

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	15	5.5%	24	5.8%	23	4.8%	30	5.1%
Black (Not Hispanic)	133	49.1%	229	55.6%	283	59.2%	361	61.0%
Hispanic	36	13.3%	34	8.3%	48	10.0%	47	7.9%
White	87	32.1%	125	30.3%	124	25.9%	154	26.0%

Source: NYSED 2004-05 Report Card

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	158	58.3%	221	53.6%	214	44.8%	310	52.4%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	45	16.6%	55	13.4%	36	7.5%	102	17.2%

Source: (2002-2003 to 2004-2005) NYSED 2004-05 Report Card, (2005-2006) NYSED Database

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
1 st Charter – 1 st Year	2000-01	Planning Year	NO		NONE
1 st Charter – 2 nd Year	2001-02	Planning Year	NO		NONE
1 st Charter – 3 rd Year	2002-03	1 st	YES	Prior Action Commencement Letter, Informal Visit Letter, and End-of-Year Report (Institute)	NONE
1 st Charter – 4 th Year	2003-04	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Report (SchoolWorks)	NONE
1 st Charter – 5 th Year	2004-05	3 rd	NO	Summary of Findings and Recommendations	Granted short-term planning renewal for a period of two years; Addition of new facility
2 nd Charter – 1 st Year	2005-06	4 th	NO		NONE
2 nd Charter – 2 nd Year	2006-07	5 th	YES	Initial Renewal Report	Initial Renewal Application Submitted June 2006 Recommended for Short-Term, Three-Year Renewal

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation: Short-Term, Three-Year Renewal with Conditions

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the Board of Trustees approve the application for charter renewal of the International Charter School of Schenectady (ICSS) and renew the charter for a period of three years, with authority to provide instruction to students in Kindergarten through eighth grade only, with a maximum enrollment of 890 students, and consistent with the other terms set forth in its renewal application.

Required Findings

Based on all the evidence submitted in its past record and as described in the application for renewal, the Institute makes the following findings required by the Charter Schools Act. The International Charter School of Schenectady as described in the renewal application meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school is an educationally sound entity and has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner during the next charter period. Finally, given the programs it will offer, and its structure and purpose, approving the school to operate for another three years is likely to improve student learning and achievement in the next charter period and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2). Accordingly, the Institute recommends the charter be renewed for a short term of three years.

Summary Discussion

In order for a charter school authorized by the Board of Trustees to make the case for a full-term renewal of five years, the school must have either: 1) compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals; or 2) made strong overall progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is particularly strong and effective.

In order for a charter school to qualify for short-term renewal (a renewal of less than five years), the school must present at least an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement as measured by the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, and it must have in place and in operation at the time of the renewal review an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, that will likely result in the school's being able to meet or come close to meeting those goals with the additional time that short-term renewal would permit.

Based on all the evidence gathered during the charter period, and as supported by the evidence and findings contained in this report, the Institute has not made and cannot make the findings

that it would need to support a positive recommendation for a full-term, five year renewal. In particular, ICSS has neither come close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals nor demonstrated strong overall progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals. However, the Institute has gathered evidence sufficient to make a recommendation that ICSS be granted a short-term renewal of three years. This recommendation is based on the conclusion that the school has had a varied or mixed record of educational achievement, and now has in place an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness that will likely result in the school's meeting or come close to meeting those goals at the end of the three-year period.

In addition to requesting a five-year charter renewal, ICSS's application also requested that the school be expanded into a Kindergarten through 12th grade school. While the school is likely to improve student learning and achievement in grades K-8, the school has not established a student performance record, especially in grades six and seven, which would justify adding additional grades. As described in this renewal report, the SABIS educational program has been inconsistently implemented at the school and staff displayed varying degrees of familiarity with it. With more time, the middle school program could establish a solid record of performance before the school expanded into high school grades, and generic SABIS plans could be more readily adapted to the specific requirements of a New York high school.

Academic Success

During the four years of the *charter period*,¹⁴ ICSS has had a mixed record of student achievement in the key subjects of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. While the school has posted generally solid results on the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP) assessment in mathematics, including meeting for the most part the required level of student proficiency, its ELA results have generally been below standard.

From a different perspective, after registering overall strong ELA and mathematics results in 2004-05, the third year of the charter, ICSS's results were notably lower in the fourth year. According to the outcome measures used to evaluate ICSS's academic attainment in 2004-05, the school came close to meeting the ELA and mathematics goals contained in its Accountability Plan.¹⁵ In 2005-06, the school met neither of these key subject area goals. ICSS has generally met its science goal; it has not met its social studies goal, but is making progress toward meeting it. According to the state's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) accountability system, the school is deemed to be in good standing.

The Institute concludes that ICSS has shown some strong results in ELA and especially in mathematics when the state exams were only administered to the fourth grade in the first three years of the charter period. However, the results for students in grades 1-7 taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) throughout the charter period have been mixed with students generally scoring below grade-level in both subjects. Similarly, in contrast to the fourth-grade-only results, the results for students participating in the state's 3-8 testing program in 2005-06 showed a low level of performance in both ELA and math.

¹⁴ The *charter period* constitutes the four years that the school has been in operation (including the two years gained by the short-term planning year renewal granted in 2005), and covers the four annual data reporting cycles from when it began operating up to this initial renewal decision.

¹⁵ ICSS's current Accountability Plan was incorporated into its charter before the beginning of the 2004-05 school year, at the beginning of its third year of operation.

The Institute also concludes that students who had been in the school longer, that is who are reported to have been enrolled for two or more years, are only slightly more likely to perform at the proficient level in ELA and mathematics than all students tested. In science, the long-term effect has been negative. In 2005-06, students enrolled for at least two years performed *less* well than all students tested.

At the time of the renewal visit in June 2006, the Institute found that many aspects of the educational program had not yet been firmly established. Over the past few years, there had been a great deal of teacher turn-over and at the time of the renewal visit, the school was in the process of changing school directors. With almost half the faculty having been at the school for less than a year, the teachers were not yet fully employing the SABIS educational model--the core of the school's program. While the SABIS model contains a comprehensive set of systems for school operation (including curriculum, assessment, discipline, student life, teacher training, student remediation, and budget, which require uniform execution), at the time of the renewal visit there was considerable variation in how the educational program functioned.

Organizational Effectiveness and Viability

In its first charter cycle, ICSS produced several positive outcomes as a school. The Student life Organization reinforced the school's mission by instilling a strong sense of responsibility, building character, and establishing fun learning environments. ICSS has been faithful to its charter's key design elements to the extent that it has implemented the SABIS model. The school is using the SABIS curriculum, which has been refined at SABIS schools internationally and is generally aligned with New York State's Learning Standards. Given the ICSS's inclusion of Spanish as an additional Accountability Plan goal and its school-wide participation in the Spanish program, it is firmly committed to 'world language' instruction. The entire school community espouses the college prep orientation of SABIS schools.

ICSS's Board of Trustees is dedicated and has high expectations of SABIS and the school leadership. The Board of Trustees has performed its oversight duties well. From the beginning, the board has carefully made decisions about the school, including a due diligence process for reviewing several educational management organizations before inviting SABIS to manage the school's operation. Since making these early decisions, the board has continually monitored all aspects of the school: financial, organizational, and academic.

Parents have positive attitudes about the school, especially appreciating the safe, warm environment, the attention paid to each child's academic performance, and the college prep orientation. They have indicated that the school offers a strong educational program in a disciplined, safe school. In addition, the school reports that over the last two years it has operated at almost full enrollment and there is a high retention rate.

With certain exceptions, the school appeared to be, and has been, in general and substantial compliance with applicable law, rules and regulations and the terms of its charter at the time of the renewal visit and during the term of its charter, respectively. With exceptions, the school also appears to have generally maintained and had in place effective systems and controls for legal compliance, although more vigilance in this regard could have avoided some minor charter violations.

Fiscal Soundness

The school completed the 2005-06 school year in stable financial condition and has been generally stable throughout its existence. The school has manageable long-term debt related to the purchase and renovation of its facility and has generated sufficient cash to fund ongoing operations. The school has generally established appropriate controls and procedures. Although the school's prior year audit reports have identified three reportable conditions related to deficiencies in the design and operation of its internal control over financial reporting, the school has taken corrective actions in a timely manner to remedy each deficiency. The school has not been cited for any material weaknesses in internal control nor has it been cited for noncompliance. The school has generally been timely in meeting its financial reporting requirements and such reporting has been complete and accurate.

The school has successfully operated in a fiscally sound manner as it has grown to its current grade configuration (K-8) and is likely to continue to do so assuming continued enrollment demand. The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period, but will modify the plan slightly to eliminate the addition of high school grades. Institute staff has estimated that the decrease in revenue from this change (just 50 fewer students in 2007-08 and 100 fewer students in 2008-09) will be largely offset by a combination of reduced variable expenses, higher than estimated per pupil revenue and a stable financial condition at the start of the new charter period. Based on its most recent student application period, the school has demonstrated a sufficient level of enrollment demand to meet the projected enrollment in the plan for grades K-8. Historically, students have returned to the school at a high rate from one year to the next which should assist the school in reaching its enrollment goals. However, while the school has consistently had a wait list, the list has been small. For example, last spring there was no waiting list at all in five of nine grades to be served.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	<p>1A.1 English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.4 Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>

Accountability Plan Academic Goals

In its Accountability Plan, the school established academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. For each goal there are specific outcome measures to demonstrate academic success. These 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 (in reading and mathematics only). The following table shows the required outcome measures for each subject area goal.

Type of Measure	Required Accountability Plan Outcome Measure	Goal			
		ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
Absolute	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.	●	●	●	●
	Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.	●	●		

Type of Measure	Required Accountability Plan Outcome Measure	Goal			
		ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
Comparative	Each year the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and are performing at or above Level 3 on the State exam will be greater than the local school district.	●	●	●	●
	Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.	●	●		
Value Added	Grade level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between their average NCE in the previous spring on a nationally normed test and an NCE of 50 in the current spring. If a grade level cohort exceeds an NCE of 50 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.	●	●		

Besides the required outcome measures under each subject area goal and a required NCLB outcome measure, the school may also have included additional self-selected academic outcome measures as part of its Accountability Plan. As the basis for determining if a school has met its goals, the various required and optional outcome measures provide the framework for evaluating the school's performance and addressing the sub-sections of this benchmark. The following tables indicate the specific outcomes under each of the goals and measures contained in the school's Accountability Plan for the charter period.¹⁶

English Language Arts Goal: *ICSS students will develop proficiency in Reading and Language Arts.*

In 2004-05, the third year of the charter period, the International Charter School of Schenectady's student performance on the state's ELA exam was exceptional. In that year, the school came close to meeting the outcome measures set for its Accountability Plan's ELA goal. Specifically, in 2004-05, ICSS nearly met its absolute measure of fourth-grade student proficiency on the state's ELA examination. In that year 71 percent of fourth grade students who were enrolled for two or more years were proficient. ICSS also met the criterion for aggregate fourth grade ELA performance under the state's NCLB accountability system. In its comparative measures, the school outperformed the district and met the measure of performing better than predicted in comparison to comparable public schools state-wide. However, in 2004-05, ICSS did not meet its value-added measure of year-to-year gains for grade level cohorts on the ITBS test, insofar as the gains were not sufficient to close appreciably the achievement gap and only three of the five cohorts (in grades 2-6) registered the requisite gains.

In 2003-04 and 2005-06, the second and fourth years of the charter period, ICSS did not meet most of its measures. While the school did meet or come close to meeting the NCLB ELA performance measure, its results were far below the absolute measure of student proficiency on the state's ELA examinations. In 2003-04 approximately one quarter of fourth grade students who were enrolled for two or more years were proficient in ELA. In 2005-06 less than 40 percent of students in grade 3-7 were proficient. In these two years, the school underperformed the district on the state ELA exam. In the fourth year,¹⁷ ICSS performed far below its predicted level of performance based on a match to

¹⁶ Bold numbers appearing in the tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was met in a given year.

¹⁷ The measure was not available in the second year of ICSS's charter.

comparable public schools state-wide. In 2003-04, ICSS came close to meeting its value-added measure of cohort gains on the ITBS,¹⁸ but in 2005-06 the school not only did not come close, but showed a year-to-year decrease in the mean score of each cohort with none of the six grade level cohort meeting their targets.

In its renewal application, ICSS points out that over the last three years, there has been a positive trend in the fourth grade state exam results: its annual scaled scores have increased faster than the district's. Aside from the technical problems associated with this analysis (comparing scores with different scales is invalid and the trend line skips the middle year), the more important consideration is that the district scores set a very low standard against which to make a comparison and that ICSS's difference from the district is minimal, given how far both are from the Institute's absolute standard of 75 percent proficiency.

Absolute Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Grade	School Year			
		2002-03 ²⁰ (N=30)	2003-04 (N=23)	2004-05 (N=41)	2005-06 (N=177)
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 ELA examination. ¹⁹	3	-	-	-	35.3
	4	46.7	26.1	70.7	40.0
	5	-	-	-	43.1
	6	-	-	-	29.0
	7	-	-	-	46.0
	All	-	-	-	39.0
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State ELA exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system. ²¹	Index	School Year			
		2002-03 (Grade 4) (N=30)	2003-04 (Grade 4) (N=29)	2004-05 (Grade 4) (N=54)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7) (N=308)
	PI	127	124	172	120
AMO	123	123	131	122	

¹⁸ At the time, its Accountability Plan measure called for cohorts to make an annual gain of 4 NCEs.

¹⁹ New York State administered ELA exams to students only in grades 4 and 8 until the 2005-06 school year when it began testing students in grades 3-8.

²⁰ In 2002-03, no students had yet been enrolled for two years. The results, which are for all students tested, provide baseline information with which to compare subsequent years' performance.

²¹ The Performance Index (PI) is calculated by adding the percent of students in all tested grades who are performing at Levels 2, 3 & 4 to the percent at Levels 3 & 4. The PI for all tested grades is compared to a single AMO rather than comparing the PI of each tested to grade to an AMO specific to that grade.

Comparative Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Comparison	School Year			
		2002-03 (Grade 4)	2003-04 (Grade 4)	2004-05 (Grade 4)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7)
A higher proportion of students who have been enrolled for at least two years will score on or above level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts Examination than students in the local school district . ²²	School	46.7	26.1	70.7	39.0
	District	47.4	44.8	53.7	43.6

Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State ELA exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State. ²³	Index	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05 (Grade 4) (N=54)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7) (N=308)
	Predicted	-	-	63.6	56.2
	Actual	-	-	72.3	37.3
	Effect Size	-	-	0.53	-0.97

Value-Added Measures	Results				
	Mean NCE	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04 (Grades 1-5) (N=211)	2004-05 (Grades 2-6) (N=157)	2005-06 (Grades 2-7) (N=159)
Each year grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between their average NCE in the previous spring on a nationally-normed reading test and an NCE of 50 in the current spring.	Baseline	-	43.6	45.6	46.9
	Target	-	46.8	47.8	48.5
	Actual	-	46.1	47.1	45.3
	Cohorts Made Target	-	(3 of 5)	(3 of 5)	(0 of 6)

Mathematics Goal: *ICSS students will develop proficiency in Mathematics.*

Up to the fourth year of the charter period, the International Charter School of Schenectady's student performance on the state's mathematics exam was strong. In those years, the school came close to meeting the outcome measures set for its Accountability Plan's mathematics goal. Specifically, ICSS continually came close to meeting its absolute measure of fourth-grade student proficiency on the state exam. For the first two years of the charter period just above 70 percent were proficient; in the third year it was 100 percent. ICSS also met its NCLB mathematics performance measure. In its comparative measures, the school out-performed the district and in the third year of the charter period²⁴ met the measure of performing better than predicted in comparison to comparable public schools state-wide. While meeting, or coming close to meeting, these four measures over the three years, ICSS did not meet its value-added measure on the ITBS test, in fact the mean scores for all students in the cohorts decreased from year to year.

²² The percentages compare the aggregate of all students performing at Levels 3 & 4 in tested grades who have been enrolled for two or more years in the charter school to the aggregate of all students in the same tested grades in the local school district.

²³ Starting in 2004-05, the Institute has conducted this Comparative Performance Analysis of the school's actual performance in relation to its predicted performance based on the performance and free-lunch statistics of all New York State schools with the same grades. This complex and fair statistical analysis provides an opportunity to see where an individual school stands compared to demographically similar schools across the state. A small Effect Size is 0.3 or greater.

²⁴ The measure was not available in the second year of ICSS's charter.

In 2005-06, the fourth year of the charter period, ICSS did not meet most of its measures. While the school did meet the state's NCLB measure in mathematics and outperformed the district on the state's mathematics exam, its results were below the absolute measure of student proficiency and below its predicted level of performance based on a match to comparable public schools state-wide. ICSS did not meet its value-added measure on the ITBS test and again the scores decreased from year to year. The fifth grade cohort, whose members had achieved 100 percent proficiency on the 2004-05 fourth grade state exam, showed the biggest decrease among all the grade level cohorts on the ITBS mathematics test. Their NCE scores decreased almost 10 points from fourth grade to fifth grade.

Absolute Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Grade	School Year			
		2002-03 (N=29)	2003-04 (N=24)	2004-05 (N=41)	2005-06 (N=173)
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 mathematics examination. ²⁵	3	-	-	-	66.0
	4	72.4	70.8	100.0	48.0
	5	-	-	-	59.0
	6	-	-	-	21.0
	7	-	-	-	45.0
	All	-	-	-	53.2
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index (PI) on the State mathematics exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set forth in the state's NCLB accountability system. ²⁶	Index	School Year			
		2002-03 ²⁷ (Grade 4) (N=29)	2003-04 (Grade 4) (N=30)	2004-05 (Grade 4) (N=56)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7) (N=309)
	PI	155	167	200	140
AMO	136	136	142	86	

²⁵ New York State administered mathematics exams to students only in grades 4 and 8 until the 2005-06 school year when it began testing students in grades 3-8.

²⁶ The Performance Index (PI) is calculated by adding the percent of students in all tested grades who are performing at Levels 2, 3 & 4 to the percent at Levels 3 & 4. The PI for all tested grades is compared to a single AMO rather than comparing the PI of each tested to grade to an AMO specific to that grade.

²⁷ In 2002-03 no students had yet been enrolled for two years; thus, the results in this year for all students tested.

Comparative Measures	Results (in percents)				
A higher proportion of students who have been enrolled for at least two years will score on or above level 3 on the New York State mathematics examination than students in the local school district . ²⁸	School Year				
	Comparison	2002-03 (Grade 4)	2003-04 (Grade 4)	2004-05 (Grade 4)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7)
	School	72.4	70.8	100.0	53.2
District	69.6	70.4	74.4	46.3	

Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State mathematics exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to a small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State. ²⁹	School Year				
	Index	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05 (Grade 4) (N=56)	2005-06 (Grades 3-7) (N=309)
	Predicted	-	-	81.7	62.0
	Actual	-	-	100.0	50.2
Effect Size	-	-	1.51	-0.56	

Value-Added Measures	Results				
Each year grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between their average NCE in the previous spring on a nationally-normed mathematics test and an NCE of 50 in the current spring.	School Year				
	Mean NCE	2002-03	2003-04 (Grades 1-5) (N=211)	2004-05 (Grades 2-6) (N=150)	2005-06 (Grades 2-7) (N=159)
	Baseline	-	46.2	47.9	48.5
	Target	-	48.1	49.0	49.3
	Actual	-	45.6	44.4	45.3
	Cohorts Made Target	-	(2 of 5)	(3 of 5)	(2 of 6)

Science Goal: *ICSS students will develop proficiency in Science.*

In 2003-04 and 2004-05, the second and third years of the charter period, ICSS met its science goal by virtue of meeting its two outcome measures. It did not meet its measures in 2005-06. While there was an upward trend during the first three years, results went down in the fourth year.

Absolute Measures	Results (in percents)				
In each year, 75 percent of fourth and eighth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science examination. ³⁰	School Year				
	Grade	2002-03 ³¹ (N=27)	2003-04 (N=24)	2004-05 (N=41)	2005-06 (N=18)
	4	51.7	79.1	85.4	64.2

²⁸ The percentages compare the aggregate of all students performing at Levels 3 & 4 in tested grades who have been enrolled for two or more years in the charter school to the aggregate of all students in the same tested grades in the local school district.

²⁹ Starting in 2004-05, the Institute has conducted this Comparative Performance Analysis of the school's actual performance in relation to its predicted performance based on the performance and free-lunch statistics of all New York State schools with the same grades. This complex and fair statistical analysis provides an opportunity to see where an individual school stands compared to demographically similar schools across the state. A small Effect Size is 0.3 or greater.

³⁰ In 2003 science results were presented as above or below the state designated level (SDL). For our purposes we use above SDL as equivalent to scoring at or above Level 3.

³¹ This is the school's first year of operation so the results are for all students tested.

Comparative Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Comparison	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
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 Science exam will be greater than that of the local school district.	School	51.7	79.1	85.4	64.2
	District	56	56	73	NA

Social Studies Goal: *ICSS students will develop proficiency in Social Studies.*

ICSS has shown improvement on each year's fifth grade social studies exam. The increasing percent of fifth graders at proficiency is bringing the school closer to meeting the absolute measure. These year-to-year increases, however, are approximately the same as those for the district.

Absolute Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Grade	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04 (N=30)	2004-05 (N=24)	2005-06 (N=49)
In each year, 75 percent of fourth and eighth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies examination. ³²	5	-	53.3	69.0	69.3

Comparative Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Comparison	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
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 Social Studies exam will be greater than that of the local school district.	School	-	53.3	69.0	69.3
	District	-	56	73	NA

NCLB Goal

In addition to meeting its specific subject area goals, ICSS 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 mathematics examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues a school accountability report, indicating the ICSS's accountability status each year. ICSS has been deemed to be in good standing.

Accountability Plan Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Status	School Year			
		2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Under the state's NCLB accountability system, the school's Accountability Status will be "Good Standing" each year. ³³	Good Standing	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes

³² ICSS did not have a 5th grade class in 2002-03.

³³ The New York State Education Department issues report cards for each school which indicate whether a school has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Schools that have not failed to make AYP for the two previous years are considered to be in "Good Standing."

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.
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The International Charter School of Schenectady has implemented an extensive assessment system which is aligned to the school’s curriculum to the extent that assessments are integral to the implementation of the curriculum itself. ICSS implements its student assessments system consistently. In fact, the pace and intent of instruction is driven by the evaluation of the data that is derived from the regimen of testing. ICSS uses two types of classroom assessments: SABIS periodic tests (grade 1 and up) and the SABIS Academic Monitoring Systems (AMS) tests (grade 3 and up). Teachers also use end-of-term tests (final exams), test guides, pre-test workbooks, teacher-prepared and SABIS-prepared review packets, and computerized test analyses as components of their assessment program. Interviews of staff members provided evidence of comprehensive and frequent assessment of student progress in mastering the SABIS learning “points.”

The testing calendar contains a schedule of test dates, incorporates weekly discussions of test results for teachers and administrators and includes revision weeks, in which concepts are reviewed in preparation for final exams. The teaching staff and the administrators have a common understanding of the purposes and impact of testing and the staff is trained in the assessment program. Staff repeatedly indicated that the assessments are the basis for subject-area grading, that they serve as the sole gauge of whether a class is ready to move on to new material and determine the need to re-teach a particular point. Assessments also provide an indication of the need for individual students to receive tutoring or to participate in the school’s remedial support program

The ICSS curriculum is tightly aligned to the assessment program. The number of SABIS exams (and the regular schedule of them) ensures that teachers keep pace with the curriculum’s scope and sequence. The assessments reflect grade-level expectations and, according to teachers, there is fast turn-around of scores so that student needs are swiftly met by re-teaching particular concepts or skills or by an appropriate grade-level placement for new students. In many respects, the SABIS curriculum and assessment program defines the core of ICSS’s education model.

Given the emphasis in the model on periodic and AMS tests, teacher use of assessment was narrowly focused. Based on classroom observations, inspectors found limited evidence of teacher’s employing informal, verbal assessment techniques. Teachers at all grades did not regularly check for understanding, even though the renewal visit was conducted during a review week. Notwithstanding, a variety of cues (e.g., students’ raising their hands and shouting out questions, as well as student prefects signaling a lack of understanding among their fellow students), teachers generally ignored the requests for clarification in order to continue with the review. Thus, it is unclear how much teachers at ICSS are able to assess student learning as they are teaching – rather than waiting for the actual tests to document the extent of mastery.

Teachers spoke of some of the SABIS rubrics being overly complex and occasionally unrelated to the New York State rubrics. From inspector observations, there was evidence of a fair amount of uncorrected student work, especially at the higher grades. Teachers were also not as familiar with results of the school’s external assessments (such as performance on New York State tests and the Iowa Assessment) as they were the internal SABIS testing program.

While grading is supposed to be completely based on periodic and AMS tests, multiple teachers currently do include “extra credit” assignments into their grading. The assignments are often from supplemental curriculum provided by teachers. While this practice may or may not have merit, the key conclusion here is that ICSS is not following the carefully designed SABIS model regarding grading.

Despite these implementation issues, the SABIS assessment program does identify at-risk students and the staff does use student data to modify instruction and improve student achievement. Another praise-worthy effect of the SABIS assessment program at ICSS is that students are found to be less concerned about testing in general. Parents noted that due to the time devoted to testing, students have become desensitized to test anxiety. Similarly, parents were pleased with the SABIS assessment program, as they receive weekly assessment packets from teachers that must be signed and returned. Through this regular distribution, parents receive consistent communications from the school about their student’s performance.

Benchmark 1C Curriculum	1C The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.
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In general, the school has implemented a rigorous curriculum; however its alignment to state standards has not yet been explicitly demonstrated. With the SABIS model, ICSS has detailed and robust curricula at all current grades, which provide an organized, cohesive, and seamless course of study from grade to grade. The school uses a set of pacing charts provided by SABIS as its primary curricular documentation. Teachers consistently stated that they rely upon these pacing charts to define the content and skills they teach. One teacher said, “As a beginning teacher, it’s a nice way to organize myself... The pacing charts have helped me keep track of where I should be.” Another teacher stated that he uses the pacing charts to identify the points, or student learning objectives, he should be teaching, as well as the curricular resources that are available.

The school made an extensive collection of these curricular resources and documents available for review by inspection team members during the renewal visit. The materials consisted largely of series of leveled texts, readers, and workbooks created by SABIS Educational Systems that spanned all elementary and middle school grades. There appears to be a high degree of alignment between the school’s pacing charts and curricular resources.

Teachers utilize the SABIS curriculum under the auspices of the school’s curriculum coordinator, called the Academic Quality Controller (AQC). She gives teachers packets of curricular materials unit-by-unit in the event that the pacing needed to be modified by reteaching specific concepts. Some teachers (especially new ones) noted that they had had some difficulty keeping up with the pacing charts.

ICSS has implemented elements of a writing program, including the use of pre-writing strategies, a standardized writing rubric and regular assessments of student writing; however, the program is not sufficiently rigorous to prepare students for writing tasks at the secondary level. There is little evidence to suggest that teachers reinforce the objectives of the school’s writing program in an integrated way throughout the curriculum. Furthermore, although the school provided a variety of student writing products for the renewal team to review, there was no evidence that these writing assignments were tied to the school’s existing writing program or writing rubrics.

In the case of the English language arts program, teachers reported that they have to find time to teach the New York State standard of listening, as it is not incorporated in the SABIS curriculum. In addition from classroom observations and staff interviews, inspectors determined that teachers are often hard pressed to find reading materials for upper grade students who are behind grade level in reading (especially new students). Staff informed the inspection team that SABIS is currently developing a reading series with appropriate tools for middle school students behind grade level. The school’s new director noted that she also hopes to use Accelerated Reader.

While ICSS administrators reported that a faithful implementation of the SABIS model would require teachers to rely completely and solely on the SABIS curriculum, many teachers described the ways in which they adjust the SABIS pacing in order to supplement the curriculum with additional content material that they believe is necessary and/or fun. The school director and several staff

members reported that the SABIS model was more effective when SABIS representatives allowed the school to adopt an additional reading series and allowed the school to develop its own writing rubric with supplementary materials. One teacher's comment is illustrative: "I am trying to piece all the essential components of reading and weave them together with the SABIS material and other literature."

Teachers maintain lesson plans; however, in interviews during the renewal visit they had differing understanding of the plans' proper development and use. When questioned about their format and content, the teaching staff and the AQC had varying responses about the process and schedule for administrative review, the intent and purpose of lesson plan preparation, and their expected level of completeness. Indeed, inspectors found that the sample of lesson plans they reviewed were incomplete. The plans were described as a method by which the AQC could ensure that the individual teacher and grade level teams were all using SABIS systems. The purpose of lesson plans appeared to be as a graphic organizer designed to provide a record of the daily planned pacing and as a means of verifying that teachers were following the "teach - practice - check or re-teach - practice - check" for all the points listed on the weekly pacing charts. After review, the administration did not provide written feedback to teachers in the lesson plans regarding instructional techniques to be used with various types of learners, how to vary materials based on student needs, etc. While the technique of using lesson plans primarily for monitoring the pace of instruction may work for veteran teachers experienced with the SABIS curriculum, the procedure limits support for newer teachers.

A centerpiece of the SABIS curriculum is based on learning objectives or standards, called "points." Notwithstanding their apparent importance, teachers often confused them with "topics." No teachers were clear on just how the SABIS points aligned to the New York State standards, though most believe that SABIS had developed a cross-walk between the curriculum and the state 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.

Instructional Leadership

ICSS’s instructional leadership follows the SABIS organizational structure of a school director, school Academic Quality Controller (AQC), and SABIS Regional AQC. The actual instructional leader of the school is the school AQC, as she directly supervises the teachers. From September 2005 - February 2006, before completing the move to the current facility, ICSS was operating at two locations. At the time of the renewal visit, administrators uniformly reported that the transition had undermined the instructional leadership of the school AQC and the school director. Instructional support may not have been as strong in 2005-06 as in previous years, because of the physical transition and because the school did not yet have an adequate number of leaders. Indeed, all of the members of the SABIS/ICSS team concluded that instructional leadership had been short-handed during the current school year and individual teacher coaching/support was not as strong as desired. Teachers noted that they received limited coaching and classroom-based support during the school year. Despite these limitations, the instructional leadership team appears to have carried out the responsibilities of the SABIS model: conducting annual teacher observations and evaluation, conducting required professional development, reviewing teacher lesson plans, and occasionally monitoring classroom activity.

At the time of the visit, ICSS was in the process of changing school directors. While the departing director reported that she disagreed with some components of the SABIS model, it is unclear if this disagreement had a direct impact on the adherence of ICSS to the SABIS model or any positive or negative impact on student performance. The new school director, who was to start her tenure in the summer of 2006, had had six years experience at SABIS schools, as a teacher and in various administrative roles.

In addition to the in-house school director and AQC, ICSS also has other key administrators, called “Pillars.” For example, there is a Director of Student Life and a Director for Student Management. The Student Life program is designed to motivate and focus students, thereby supporting the efforts of the school’s instructional leadership. Similarly, the Student Management program is designed to support order and discipline, and ultimately to improve the learning environment. Both programs appear to be working appropriately according to their respective models.

*Pedagogy*³⁴

Through observations and conversations, the renewal team observed that lesson-pacing was rigorous in most classrooms as a result of the clear and tightly organized curriculum, as well as the focus on efficiency in the delivery of instruction. The team also observed examples of fine pedagogy.

- One teacher carried a manual sharpener in his pocket and sharpened student pencils as necessary to minimize disruption, allowing him to circulate around the classroom, attending to individual needs.
- A push-in special education teacher offered a student superb one-on-one task support, checking with the student for understanding at each step.
- One lower grade teacher so captivated her class that the students learned a new way to do division extremely swiftly. The teacher effectively utilized students in the “prefect system.”

Aside from these pockets of excellence, inspectors found that the quality of instruction was inconsistent from classroom to classroom, as the quality of teachers’ instructional techniques and content knowledge varied. Many teachers did not provide rigorous and probing questions. Also, while teachers listed points on the board to be covered during the re-teach and review sessions, they often did not actually cover all of the points during the instructional periods.

In several classrooms in both upper and lower grades, inspectors observed that student engagement in lessons was limited. In these classrooms, students were staring off and day-dreaming, their heads on the desks. Inspectors repeatedly observed pockets of students simply not doing work. Many transitions from lesson to lesson were slower than they should have been, largely due to low-level misbehavior or students simply not immersed in the activity.

Teachers lacked content knowledge in science. During science lessons, inspectors observed that teacher explanations about solutions, suspensions, and mixtures were often incorrect and the inaccuracies were reinforced in non-related or inconsistent exemplars. In one instance, science materials that have a potential low-level danger when improperly handled were being passed among students without the proper precautions (i.e. gloves, goggles, and ventilation). Teachers did not model proper precautions, nor appear to understand that precautions were necessary. In a discussion following a video about earthquakes, the teacher’s explanation of the Richter scale was not accurate or complete and the definitions of tsunami and quake waves were incorrect.

With respect to the SABIS instructional model itself, teachers’ pedagogical skill in utilizing appropriate instructional techniques varied. According to the SABIS model, teachers should be using student prefects and the point system, while following the precept of “teach - practice - and check.” Despite their importance in the SABIS model, teachers used student prefects irregularly. A few teachers claimed that using students as prefects tends to decrease the teachers’ ability to control their classrooms. Other teachers indicated that they employed the prefect procedures simply as a classroom “job” system, or that they preferred not to use prefects, because of the resistance from other students in being monitored by their peers. Academic conversation among students was virtually non-existent and despite the intent of the prefect system, no student-to-student coaching was

³⁴ At the time of the visit on June 5-7, 2006, ICSS was conducting a review week, when students receive review-type lessons and where new content is unlikely to be taught. As such, pedagogy may not be representative of the rest of the school year.

observed. Prefects (when used) were simply checking for understanding or, most often, the completion of work.

At-Risk Students

The school has comprehensive methods for identifying students at-risk of academic failure. The SABIS model appears to provide a variety of strategies to address the needs of these students. As was noted in the 2004 third-year report of ICSS, prepared by SchoolWorks on behalf of the Institute, ICSS provides various supports for students who are below grade-level, falling behind, and generally at-risk. Student performance data is utilized to trigger many interventions, though teachers were not fully aware of the various resources the school offers to support student learning needs.

ICSS has two basic types of support programs: one-to-one tutoring that provides instruction specific to the identified shortcoming and the Intensive Program for students significantly behind their peers in either mathematics or reading. The tutoring is conducted by a teacher during the day, after school or on Saturday, or it is conducted as a part of the Student Life program, perhaps involving older students acting as prefects and tutors.

Students are assigned to the Intensive Program after having been identified by the AQC in consultation with their teachers. This pull-out program is conducted in a separate classroom by a certified instructor who focuses on teaching basic concepts. Students end their participation in the program when both the intensive teacher and the classroom teacher determine that the student's performance is adequate.

The Intensive Program and the tutoring program rely on the school's assessment system to identify student need. Aside from these two remedial programs, ICSS provides diagnostic testing for all new students in order to make appropriate grade-level placements. In addition, ICSS also administers the Degrees of Reading Assessment (DRA) to organize reading groups. Starting in the first grade, students take the Star Reading test at the beginning of the year and then each term in order to assess reading ability. This practice gives the school baseline data to document reading progress.

In the upper grades, some students are also using the Accelerated Reader program for remediation. Students use "Hi-Lo" book libraries for practice. Because SABIS does not identify reading text books by grade-level, students who are below grade-level are more accepting of using a variety of texts and are more open to remediation.

Finally, ICSS has a very clear retention policy. If a student fails mathematics and reading (with grades below 60 percent), the student is to be retained in grade. If a student fails either mathematics or reading, the student is to go to summer school. If a student fails summer school, he/she is to be retained in grade.

The instructional staff showed varied understanding of the guidelines for entering and exiting the support programs. They reported different criteria for determining when a student is to be identified as in need of push-in and pull-out support. Several teachers believed that classroom behavior is also a deciding factor on when a student is to return to the general classroom from remedial settings. Similarly, teachers were unclear about what to do if students do not pass the AMS test after taking it for the second time. Not having a common understanding of the school's policies may contribute to an uneven application of resources for students in need.

Special Education

The school's special education (SPED) program is headed by a Special Education Coordinator and serves 25 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The school has no English language learners.

The school's Child Find mechanism is based on teacher referral and makes use of an instructional support team, which doubles as the Section 504 Rehabilitation Act team and usually meets weekly. Appropriate forms and checklists related to referrals were noted. In cases where the need for a Committee on Special Education (CSE) referral is not immediately apparent after initial evaluation, the school implements its own plan of supports and evaluates in writing how those supports are working prior to reconvening. If a student is ultimately classified by the CSE as having a disability, the SPED Coordinator follows up with regular and special education teachers regarding their roles in implementing the student's IEP.

The school has attempted to classify more students through its Child Find mechanism, but has met stiff resistance from the Schenectady City School District (SCSD) Committee on Special Education. According to the school, rather than classifying children, the SCSD CSE has been finding, for example, that speech, occupational and physical "improvement" rather than therapy is needed. In such cases, classification is denied as is future payment for special education services to the school, which provides all of its own services. The school also stated that in regard to referrals based on disciplinary problems, the SCSD CSE has required more documentation than the school has been able to provide thereby denying the inclusion of behavioral intervention programs and counseling in IEPs. The school was urged to contact the State Education Department regarding these issues, which have strained the relationship between the school and the CSE.

Benchmark 1E	
Student Order & Discipline	1E The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.

ICSS offers a safe and orderly environment. The student handbook is very clear about desired behavior as well as consequences for poor discipline. In addition, a parent/student/school contract, which parents and students are encouraged to sign, delineate expected behavior. In grades 4 and above, teachers are expected to use cards to keep running records of student behavior and discipline, which are to be turned in each week, using Student Management Referral Forms. At the time of the renewal visit, the school’s uniform policy was not enforced.

Despite these codified expectations, teachers used a variety of discipline systems within their classrooms. While some teachers did use the card system, others used a “Bonus Point” system, and still others simply ignored low-level misbehavior. The actual discipline policy seems to be that teachers are expected to handle most behaviors within their classroom. Teachers are generally able to contain discipline problems. Very few students spend time in the in-house suspension room. In addition, an emergency “lockdown” occurred during the renewal site visit, because, according to the school, a parent had threatened administrators and threatened to enter a classroom to confront a teacher. This procedure was conducted with great speed, efficiency, and professionalism. Students were calmed and adults acted very appropriately.

Student motivation is clearly a foundation and goal of the SABIS model. For the most part, students at ICSS were engaged and orderly. In most rooms, teachers had a respectful rapport with students, especially in the lower grades. While the school director is the chief disciplinarian, according to SABIS training materials, the Student Management Coordinator is the “glue that keeps the team cohesive and, consequently, effective.”

At the time of the visit, the inspectors observed that low level misbehavior was tolerated in a number of classrooms, especially in the upper grades (for the seventh grade, this may be attributable to transition among four different teachers in one classroom during the course of the year). In these classrooms, students were often disengaged from the learning process. In many cases, teachers accepted this state because students were passive, out of their visual field and generally not disrupting the instructional activity. The attendant low level misbehavior may be related to the lesson not being motivating, rather than to classroom management issues.

Benchmark 1F Professional Development	1F	The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.
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The quality and quantity of professional development and coaching have been insufficient to maximize student achievement. The school director reported that in the first two years of the school, only a small handful of teachers left the school and in the third year seven teachers left. Since that time the school has experienced significant teacher turnover; consequently, at the time of the renewal visit, the school had a relatively new staff—11 new teachers in the 2005-06 school year. Nine of those individuals started teaching at the school after the beginning of the school year (after September 2005). At the time of the visit, 15 of 30 teachers had one year or less of teaching experience at ICSS. The school has experienced a pattern of ever-increasing teacher turnover since June of 2004.

Given this level of teacher turnover, the standard SABIS professional development program seems to be inadequate. While a great deal of resources are devoted to summer staff training, many members of the staff only began teaching at the school after this essential summer training focus on the SABIS model had been offered.

During the school year there were regularly scheduled professional development events such as school and grade-level meetings and in-service training sessions. Teachers attended conferences based on individual teacher’s particular needs/interests. In addition, teachers participated in three days of professional development during the school year; however, these three days did not necessarily dovetail with ICSS’s curriculum, instructional strategy, or mission. For example, one of the school’s last school-wide professional development days was devoted to a presentation on gangs. While this topic may be worthwhile, much of the teacher training that is offered is dedicated to learning general procedures, rather than improving specific instructional techniques.

The AQC was available to help teachers review SABIS procedures and requirements and ICSS had recently established a mentor teaching program, which focused on enabling new teachers to develop SABIS procedures. As such, the ICSS professional development program was not adequately addressing the actual instructional needs of the teaching staff. Indeed, individual teacher coaching was limited, especially for more veteran teachers. While instructional support was offered regularly at weekly grade level meetings, these sessions did not afford an opportunity for directed, individual coaching.

The school has a well-developed teacher evaluation system. At the time of the renewal visit, the AQC and the school director had completed two formal observations of teachers during the course of the year. SABIS had provided them with a set of specific performance criteria, each weighted according to their importance in carrying out aspects of the SABIS model, thereby reinforcing the SABIS mission, curriculum, and instructional method. On the basis of these observations, teachers received formal written performance reviews with associated salary increases as merit pay raises.

Consistent with the focus in the ICSS professional development program of instilling the general procedures of the SABIS model, teachers reported that there was very little follow-up to the formal

and informal observations. For example, one teacher who had become a classroom teacher at the school after Thanksgiving reported that the school director did not visit her class until February and the AQC did not come in until March. While the teacher received a few suggestions during these visits, there was no follow-up.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Benchmark 2A School Specific Non-Academic Goals	2A The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).

In its Accountability Plan, in addition to the academic goals, ICSS includes a World Languages (Spanish) Goal. According to the renewal application, the overall goal of the Spanish program is that students enrolled in ICSS for at least two years demonstrate proficiency in a second language through instruction in Spanish, beginning in Kindergarten.

Goal: Students enrolled in ICSS for at least two years will demonstrate proficiency in a second language through instruction in Spanish, beginning in Kindergarten.

Unique Measures

- Each year, students enrolled in ICSS for at least two years will demonstrate proficiency in the language by attaining grades of 75% or higher on SABIS-produced examinations of reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities.
- Each year, the percentage of students who have reported grades of 75% or higher in Spanish will increase over the previous year.

ICSS reports that students are learning Spanish and that the school met the goal in 2004-05. According to the Renewal Application, 95-100 percent of students in each grade, who were enrolled at ICSS for more than two years, received grades of 75 percent or higher. These grades are reported to be higher than those from the previous year. In 2005-06, the proportion of students receiving 75 percent or higher decreased in most of the grades. Despite the decrease, given the continued high proportion overall, the program appears to be successful. However, as the school does not provide any information about the criteria and method for grading or the performance standards of the program, the validity and reliability of the grades cannot be determined.

Unique Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Grade	School Year			
		2002-03 ³⁵ (N=142)	2003-04 ³⁶ (N=304)	2004-05 (N=308)	2005-06 (N=)
Each year, students enrolled in ICSS for at least two years will demonstrate proficiency in the language by attaining grades of 75% or higher on SABIS®-produced examinations of reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities.	1	76.9	62.7	98.8	100.0
	2	95.8	60.0	98.9	100.0
	3	100.0	56.1	97.6	70.7
	4	82.8	80.0	95.1	96.7
	5	-	65.3	100.0	84.4
	6	-	-	100.0	85.7
	7				80.0
	All	88.7	63.2	98.4	88.2

Unique Measures	Results (in percents)				
	Final Grades	School Year			
		2002-03 (N=142)	2003-04 (N=304)	2004-05 (N=356)	2005-06 (N=466)
Each year, the percentage of students who have reported grades of 75% or higher in Spanish will increase over the previous year.	75% or higher	88.7	63.2	95.2	86.7
	Change from previous year	-	-25.6	32.0	-8.5

³⁵ This was the school's first year of operation. The results, which are for all students, provide a baseline.

³⁶ Results are reported for all students.

Benchmark 2B Mission & Design Elements	2B The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.
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ICSS’s mission statement, which has remained unchanged from the time of its original charter, is as follows:

The International Charter School of Schenectady will be recognized as a provider of top quality education to a highly diverse student body. It will prepare all students for success in college, equip them with the ability and desire for life-long learning, and strengthen their civic, ethical, and moral values. The School will maintain high standards of efficiency and accountability throughout its operation.

ICSS has been faithful to its overall mission and has implemented several components of the SABIS model, though not all design components. Almost all stakeholders at the school continually reference their goal of the students being college bound.

ICSS’s key design elements include:

- A highly structured, internationally oriented curriculum in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and world languages aligned to the New York State’s Learning Standards;
- A hierarchy of subjects, with priority placed on English and mathematics, followed by a second language (Spanish);
- Defined skills and knowledge which all students must master, broken down further into “essential concepts”;
- An emphasis on college preparation;
- An Academic Monitoring System, consisting of near weekly system-wide computer-scored assessments in grade three and above intended to identify learning gaps and facilitate supplemental tutoring;
- A Student Life program, designed to foster team-work, respect, and responsibility; and
- Utilization of a “point system” in which teachers monitor written demonstration of learning objectives and essential skills before moving on to additional concepts.

ICSS is faithful to its charter’s key design elements to the extent that it has implemented the SABIS model. The school is using the SABIS curriculum, employed at SABIS schools internationally. The curriculum is generally aligned with New York State’s Learning Standards. Given ICSS’s inclusion of Spanish as an additional Accountability Plan goal and its school-wide participation in the Spanish program, it is firmly committed to ‘world language’ instruction. Again, the entire school community espouses the college prep orientation of SABIS schools; on the other hand, because the school was only operating grades K-7, the concrete indications were limited. The school was fully engaged in its Academic Monitoring System, which drove instructional decisions for conducting class reviews and identifying students for special tutoring.

ICSS has begun implementation of the SABIS Student Life program, designed to foster team-work, respect, and responsibility. The school's Student Life Organization was launched at the start of the 2004-05 school year and by the renewal visit had developed into an in-depth program run largely by students to support goals of good citizenship.

The Student Life Program at the school also directly supports the mission and values of the school. In particular it attempts to build character and leadership qualities in students. "Deputy Prefects" manage a host of activities under select topics with the Director of Student Life: academic, discipline, management, sports, activities, and outreach. The school's many diverse and interesting clubs are also operated out of the Student Life program. Finally, Student Life also offers a weekly advisory class for grades 5-7. This course is designed as a student motivator and character development opportunity.

As referenced earlier in this report, the SABIS model has not yet been fully implemented in a number of areas. Despite the priority of English and mathematics instruction, student achievement in these critical subjects was down in 2005-06 compared to 2004-05. As noted, earlier, despite the standards of efficiency and accountability, stated in the school mission, Point and Prefect System were used inconsistently, especially among newer teachers. Also, teachers' grading of students was not always based strictly on criteria set forth in the SABIS model and teachers used supplemental curriculum material on an *ad hoc* basis.

Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.
	2C.2	The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.

Board Operation

The Board of Trustees has performed its oversight duties well. From the beginning, the board has carefully made decisions about the school, including a due diligence process to review several educational management organizations before inviting SABIS to manage the school’s operation. Since making these early decisions, the board has continually monitored all aspects of the school: financial, organizational, and academic. In addition, board members have traveled to Springfield, Massachusetts to learn about the operation of an established SABIS high school program.

The board believes the mission of the school is to serve a diverse population, offer high quality education, provide a college prep program, and instill strong values in its students. The board maintains the following committees: Audit (financial), Facilities, Nominating, and Public Relations. It has been remarkably stable – maintaining at least four founding members.

While members had been challenged by facilities issues throughout the life of the charter, they have remained focused on academic results. Board members review academic results monthly from the school director’s report, staff reports, and test score reports. The board has asked SABIS for explanation for, and response to, low test scores. For example, the board requested that SABIS initiate corrective action two years ago when state ELA scores remained low. SABIS determined that staff changes were called for and a better curriculum alignment with New York State standards needed to be made. The board has welcomed SABIS’s ongoing testing with quick turnaround, because it decreases the likelihood that students will fall behind.

While it renewed the SABIS contract in September 2005, it recently determined that the contract’s academic performance measures had to be made more specific, with more clearly defined measurable objectives. At the time of the renewal visit, the board reported that they were still in the process of reaching an understanding of what measures the management company would be held accountable for.

Board Policies and Practices

With the exception below, the board has instituted and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them. When the Institute asked about some of the compliance and policy deficiencies, school board members responded that in many cases they too had mentioned those issues to the school’s management company, SABIS, but had not received satisfactory responses. Board members stated that as long as SABIS delivered sound academic performance, they did not want to push too hard on non-academic issues.

The board's by-laws contain both a conflict of interest policy and an adequate code of ethics. With one minor exception referenced under Section 3 of the Benchmarks, the school board has avoided creating conflicts of interest and handled same appropriately.

In November of 2004, the school attempted to amend its by-laws without consulting the Institute in a theoretical violation of its charter agreement. While the amendment was determined to be non-material, it was discovered that the school board had not properly been following the staggered trustee term provision in its by-laws, and that a few technical defects existed in other by-laws language. As a result the school re-drafted its by-laws in May 2006, which are included in the renewal application.

While the board hears complaints from parents and had a statement in its parent manual that complaints "will be taken seriously by the school administration and will be dealt with promptly," the school did not have a working complaint policy compliant with the Charter Schools Act. When asked, employees either referenced the complaint policy in the school's charter, which they could not produce, or a paragraph in the school's management contract, which is inadequate in terms of legal requirements.

Similarly, while the school had an Open Meetings Law policy in its charter, there was little evidence that employees had a working policy in the school even though very few violations of that law were noted. The school did have a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) policy, but it needed to be updated for statutory changes. A policy and forms for compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) were also absent.

The Institute's discipline policy and procedures review revealed detailed forms for discipline referral and tracking (weekly) as well as a *Student Management Coordinator Manual*, which is available online. The policies dealt with in-school and out-of-school suspensions for general education students but none of the policies discussed discipline of students with disabilities (identified by the Committee on Special Education) except the discipline policy in the charter for students with disabilities, to which none of the implementing staff had access. Nonetheless, the Institute's inquiries led to the conclusion that the school in fact follows proper procedures for notifying the CSE regarding suspension, engaging in the manifestation determination process and providing services and alternative instruction for special education students. Staff persons in charge of discipline also check with the Special Education Coordinator to determine whether or not a student is classified. Alternative instruction was not listed in the general education discipline policy, but again, in practice it was offered at the school between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. for suspended students. Due process protections appeared in internal policy documents and were referenced in parent letters. However, the school's student manual stated that parents of expelled students "may request a formal hearing." Such language misconstrues the due process protection afforded by federal law – that a hearing must be held prior to any long term suspension or expulsion. Another defect noted was that the school's discipline policies did not include any references to the federal Gun Free Schools Act, which applies to the school.

While there was evidence that policies were being reviewed and updated occasionally, the school board had not implemented a needed systematic review of policies nor demanded that SABIS do the same. The Institute will resolve the above policy deficiencies through a corrective plan.

The school has a very good board book that included the by-laws and other relevant governance information.

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

Parents have positive attitudes about the school, especially appreciating the safe environment, the attention paid to each child’s academic performance, and the college prep orientation. At the time of the renewal visit, parents reported that ICSS has provided a safe, warm environment for children. They indicated that the school offered a strong educational program in a disciplined, safe school. They believed that their children were making gains academically and that discipline was fair and tough, though they acknowledged that there are students who repeatedly get in trouble and that the upper grades do have discipline problems.

Parents were pleased that students are taking Spanish. They liked the continuous testing system and the opportunity for their students to take the tests again after teachers’ re-teaching of concepts. Parents spoke of students having less test anxiety due to frequent testing. Parents also noted that students truly enjoy the Student Life Program (clubs, special responsibilities, taking care of pets, specials, etc.) and that it was a source of student motivation. While parents are pleased with the mission of college-readiness, slightly longer day, and Intensives, they did note that they do not feel they know the “SABIS model,” despite attempts to learn about it.

Parents also reported receiving easy-to-understand report cards three times a year as well as a weekly newsletter from each teacher. They mentioned utilizing WebParent, a web-based parent communication tool introduced in 2005-06, to gain access to current information on their student’s academic progress, student discipline, and attendance, as well as school notices to parents and school activities.

In the most recent parent survey, almost 90 percent of the responding parents gave positive answers to each of the five areas of focus. These results are reported to be better than in the previous year. However, while the positive attitudes are encouraging, they are based on a limited response rate. The application indicates that parents representing only 56 percent of the students responded to the survey, suggesting that the degree of satisfaction may not be as positive among the entire parent population.

In addition to survey data, the renewal application includes other indicators of parent satisfaction: enrollment as a proportion of school capacity and retention rate. The proportion of enrollment to school capacity is reported to have increased over each of the first three years of the charter; the effective retention rate in September from the previous June is reported to have been 96 percent in September 2006, up from 87 percent in September 2005 (excluding students who moved and special education placements).

Benchmark 2E Legal Requirements	2E The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.
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As part of the Institute’s legal review, compliance deficiencies noted by the State Education Department (SED) in June 2003 during its comprehensive monitoring visit, were re-examined. As discussed below, in some cases the school had come into compliance and created policies and procedures to help prevent future lapses, in other cases the deficiencies were not fully remedied.

SED noted that the school was not in compliance with the teacher certification provisions of the New York Charter Schools Act (Education Law § 2854(3)(a-1)) with two teachers not certified or applying for certification, including one special education (SPED) teacher, and four teachers in the process of being certified, including one SPED teacher. Unfortunately, at the time of the renewal visit the school was larger, as was its certification problem with ten teachers out of 41 not certified, including two who had submitted all paperwork and were awaiting certification. Five teachers were not “highly qualified” under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). One teacher was not NCLB highly qualified or certified to teach her 7th grade classes although she was qualified and certified for her grade 5-6 teaching. As a result, the school will be placed on corrective action and asked to provide a schedule of what steps are needed for teachers to become certified and NCLB highly qualified and when those steps will be taken.

In terms of the provision of health services, SED had found that all students did not have health histories from sending districts. On a sampling basis, the Institute found that student health histories were in student files for both Kindergarten and older students at the time of the renewal visit. SED had also found that “right-to-know” hazardous substance training was not available to staff (contrary to Article 28 of the Labor Law, section 875 *et seq.*). At the time of the renewal visit, school staff stated that Schenectady County is now doing such training. According to SED, the school also failed to have its nurse participate in Committee on Special Education (CSE) or Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 committee meetings. (This violation was directly applicable for only one student.) At the time of the renewal visit, the school generally still did not have the nurse participate in CSE or Section 504 committee meetings because she was only a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) working under the supervision of a Registered Nurse (RN), who was not supervising the LPN for such functions. When the school moved from Schenectady to Rotterdam, however, the RN was no longer supervising the school’s LPN, creating a violation of law. To remedy the situation the school stated that it has budgeted funds for an RN and, after input from the Institute, will be seeking services from sending districts under section 912 of the Education Law. The balance of the health services program at the school appeared to comply with applicable law and regulations.

More importantly, SED determined the school was not providing programs and services to students with disabilities as required by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), teachers and other instructors were not properly informed regarding their responsibilities to students with IEPs, and, as mentioned above, properly qualified staff was not providing those services in some cases. At the time of the renewal visit the school’s Special Education Coordinator, who has been in that position only since February 2006 and is a licensed speech/language pathologist, was in the process of bringing the school into compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and

Section 504. The school employed another licensed speech pathologist and three properly certified special education teachers, although one special education teacher had been teaching 7th grade special education students without special education certification in that grade until the hiring of the third special education teacher. At the time of the renewal visit, it appeared that IEPs were being implemented by the school as written, teachers had copies of IEPs in lockable storage and either the Special Education Coordinator or a special education teacher was explaining each student's IEP to his or her general education teacher(s). In cases where annual or triennial reviews of IEPs were late, the blame must be placed largely on the Schenectady City School District CSE rather than the school because the school does not control the process. While the school had been querying SED regarding such situations, it had not been documenting its requests to the district CSE and copying SED, which may have aided in IDEA compliance. In terms of special education referrals to CSEs, the school admitted that prior to February 2006, there was a backlog of referrals, but that by the time of the renewal visit all children who had been screened and later identified as being in need of special education services, had been referred to CSEs.

With respect to the school's compliance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and IDEA record keeping requirements, the school was not keeping appropriate logs of who accessed student files as required, even though it maintained a record of staff members removing files from storage areas. Also, while the school's employee handbook covers aspects of confidentiality of student records, it does not refer to FERPA nor fulfill any of the required elements such as listing of employees with access to records as required by IDEA regulations (34 C.F.R. § 300.572(d)), etc. Other required elements of FERPA were also absent; thus, parents were not being made aware of their access rights.

A few New York Public Officers Law issues were noted. The school was not in compliance with the New York Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requirement of posting a notice regarding availability of records. Also, on a few occasions, the school board's minutes reflected only that there was an abstention without noting which board member abstained in violation of the Open Meetings Law and FOIL, both of which require that each school board member's vote be recorded. In terms of public notice of board meetings, however, the school not only sends a notice to the *Schenectady Gazette* and posts notices in the school as required, but also alerts parents through its *Thursday Letter*. Another Open Meetings Law shortcoming was the lack of minutes for school board committee meetings.

Facility related issues at the school were minimal. A few rooms in the school did not have escape routes posted. In addition, the school's Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) school safety plan was in need of updating (last update March 2005) because of the school's move from Schenectady. As a result the plan needed to be made specific to the current building and the new municipality, which effort the school represented as being under way.

With the exceptions noted above and under Benchmark 2C.2, the school appeared to be in general and substantial compliance with applicable law, rules and regulations and the terms of its charter at the time of the renewal visit. With the foregoing exceptions, during the term of its charter, the school appears to have compiled a record of general and substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, including generally submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner. Also, the school generally has maintained and had in place effective systems and controls for legal compliance. The school has had an active and ongoing relationship with the Gordon Seigel Law Firm, which has helped the school board resolve many issues related to facilities, contracts and governance.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning	3A 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.

The school has operated pursuant to long range plans. The school’s annual budgets have provided a realistic framework for spending activities and monitoring procedures are in place. Budget to actual reports are prepared and reviewed monthly. The school’s actual revenue has exceeded actual expenses and the school has maintained adequate cash flow to support operations.

The school has a process in place to closely monitor its financial performance versus its budget. 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. Cash flow is also monitored closely.

The school is professionally managed by SABIS on behalf of the board. Since its founding in 1985, SABIS has established a range of private and public schools around the world. The first SABIS managed charter school was establish in 1995 in Massachusetts. The extensive business management experience of SABIS has assisted the school in budgeting and planning for future operations.

<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3B</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>
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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 written fiscal policies and procedures covering financial reporting, budgeting, bank accounts, purchasing, disbursements (including payroll), cash receipts, bank reconciliations, record retention and other matters. However, the policies are currently a hodgepodge of various sources. As a result, the school needs to update its policies and ideally would have the updated policies reviewed and approved by the board. Also, although the school has a system to record fixed assets; it has not established procedures for identifying fixed assets, maintaining inventory records of equipment and performing periodic physical inventories of fixed assets.

The school generally established and maintained appropriate internal controls with one notable exception in the 2004-05 school year. A theft of school lunch receipts of \$9,269 was perpetrated by a school employee. The school did not have sufficient controls in place to prevent or detect the theft in a timely manner. The school has since revised and strengthened its lunch receipt procedures appropriately. The loss was mitigated by insurance that covered all but \$1,000 of the loss.

The school has adopted a code of ethics for its board members, officers and employees. The code specifically requires board members to exercise their duties of care and loyalty in a manner consistent with their positions as fiduciaries. Further it indicates they should avoid conflicts of interest and disclose potential conflicts as soon as they become aware of them. The board disclosed one instance of a conflicted transaction that occurred in the 2004-05 school year. A board member sold the school a used piano for \$400 in December 2005. The school represented that the amount paid was below market price and provided documentation at the time of the visit that the amount paid was reasonable. While the Institute concluded that no private inurement occurred in this instance, the board could improve its procedures to guard against any appearance of conflict. In this case, three steps would have better clarified the process. First, have non-interested board members verify the need and identify possible sources for obtaining for the item. Second, obtain and retain contemporaneous documentation regarding the market price of the item. Third, have the board select the source that best meets the school’s requirements concerning price and quality. The final selection should be by board vote of non-conflicted members.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p>
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The school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were generally filed on time. Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor’s opinion, the school’s financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with generally accepted United States accounting principles. All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school’s financial statements.

Since its inception, the school’s audit reports have identified three reportable conditions related to deficiencies in the design and operation of its internal control over financial reporting but the school has taken corrective actions in a timely manner to remedy each such deficiency. The school has not been cited for any material weaknesses in internal control or for any instances of non-compliance. The school has generally been timely in meeting its financial reporting requirements and such reporting has been complete and accurate.

The school’s independent auditor has issued written management letters in conjunction with the annual financial statement audit of the school and the school has implemented recommendations contained in those letters. The most recent management letter did not contain any repeat recommendations from prior years, indicating that the school has implemented prior year recommendations.

The Board reviews and approves acceptance of its annual financial statement audit report. As part of that process, the board’s audit committee meets with the independent auditors, which is considered a best practice.

Benchmark 3D Financial Condition	3D	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).
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The school completed the 2005-06 school year in stable and improved financial condition. The school's total net assets increased by \$906,669 and it finished with total net assets of \$1,157,699. The school increased its cash position by \$192,557. The school has property, plant and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$3,213,067 that consists of land, furniture fixtures and computer equipment.

As of June 30, 2006, the school had long-term debt totaling \$2.5 million secured by property and related fixtures and equipment located at its Draper Avenue facility. During the last school year, the school purchased its present educational facility for \$1.6 million and incurred renovation charges of about \$1.5 million. The school has subsequently entered into a \$4.5 million mortgage note and building loan contract. The proceeds of this loan are being used for additional renovations to the facility.

The school has generated adequate cash flow to support operations. For the year ended June 30, 2006, net cash provided by operating activities totaled \$871,634. Spending per student (total expenses, including grant related, divided by the revised approved enrollment) in each year was as follows:

2003	2004	2005	2006
\$ 7,961	\$ 8,435	\$ 7,511	\$ 8,592

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 4 Should the School’s Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?
Benchmark 4A Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)	4A Key structural elements of the school’s plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

In its renewal application, ICSS presents key structural elements of the school’s plans for the next charter period. Plans regarding the configuration of the school calendar and school day, and governance appear to be reasonable, feasible and achievable. The school calendar and school day follow the same design as in the initial charter period: 180 school days and a school day of seven and one half hours. No changes are planned for how ICSS would be governed during the next charter term. The governance would be based on the same structure for board oversight of the school’s fiscal, organizational, and academic operations and the board would follow its current by-laws.

The Institute’s concern surrounds the planned expansion to a K-12 school (specifically adding grades 9-12), that was also included in the proposed depiction of the school in the next charter period. In response to an Institute request for more details about plans for the high school program, SABIS submitted an amendment to the renewal application on August 1, 2006. The submitted document presents the SABIS model as it is generally implemented in its other United States charter schools. The compilation of policies and practices is reflective and comprehensive, showing a great deal of thought and research about delivering a sound educational program, but it is nevertheless generic with little discussion about how it would be specifically implemented in Schenectady, New York.

While the material provided substance for understanding the general educational program, it did not address the particulars of a New York high school situated in an urban area with primarily a low income population. The document continually alludes to SABIS’s college prep mission, stating that the company’s focus is *not* on high school graduation; however, the reality of even getting to college in New York is passing five Regents exams, which represent a set of performance standards specific to New York and critical to any New York public high school curriculum.

SABIS’s standardized “High School Course Path” lists Advanced Placement (AP) classes in virtually all subjects by the 12th grade. Courses related to Regents are not included. While high expectations are commendable, a course of study consisting predominantly of AP classes either ignores the local population or presupposes that most students will have left the school prior to the 12th grade.

The amendment to the application makes specific reference to the Regents twice. At one point, it states that “ICSS students must also pass N[ew] Y[ork] state Regents exams.” But elsewhere, it

characterizes the Regents as a “State Optional Exam.” Similarly, the draft Accountability Plan, appended to the renewal application, does not include the Regents exams as a measure of high school student achievement. The plans, as presented, may be reasonable as a general model, but without incorporating the Regents as explicit high school graduation requirements, are not feasible.

It should be noted that SABIS has been operating Kindergarten through 12th grade schools since the mid-1970s. SABIS has an enrollment of 28,000 students in its schools and maintains a college prep program with well-documented assessments and curriculum. SABIS has other urban charter schools in Flint, Michigan, Phoenix, Arizona, and Springfield, Massachusetts. From a review of data presented by SABIS and from a school visitation to the Springfield, Massachusetts K-12 school, SABIS has had relatively strong school performance in these locations.

The Institute visited the SABIS International Charter School in Springfield, Massachusetts (opened in 1995), and reviewed the school’s “Year Twelve Site Visit Report,” prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Education’s Charter School Office (MA DOE CSO) in January 2007, to learn more about the SABIS model. While many positive attributes of the model were observed during the Institute’s visit to SABIS International Charter School and noted within MA DOE CSO’s report, the following issues reinforce conclusions drawn from the ICSS renewal visit: (1) the SABIS’ curriculum was only recently aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (work that was prompted by a finding made within the Summary of Review prepared by the MA DOE CSO in preparation for SABIS International Charter School’s renewal in 2004); (2) reports that the SABIS curriculum (especially pacing) continues to have to be significantly altered for students who are behind grade level; (3) staff noted that they have no common time during the day to plan. Staff also noted that they receive limited ongoing professional development during the school year. Again, while the Institute commends the SABIS model for its operation in many locations, the presence of these issues at another SABIS school in its twelfth year of instruction does not support the notion that the SABIS model may be readily adapted to meet the exigencies of a high school program in Schenectady, New York.

Given the Institute’s recommendation that the school continue to serve Kindergarten through eighth grades only, the school has submitted an additional amendment to its renewal application, including a revised enrollment structure. These revised plans are consistent with the school’s current structure, organization, and facilities plans.

Benchmark 4B Plans for the Educational Program	4B The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.
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ICSS’s plans call for continuing to use the SABIS educational model, including its Student Life Program, and teaching and assessment systems for its requested growth into Grades 8-12. Its college preparatory mission would remain unchanged, and it would continue to deliver its instructional program during the next charter term. As such, its renewal application indicates that the school’s mission, philosophy, curricular and assessment system, school design, and organizational model described in the original charter application would be retained in full.

The proposal for the next charter period is explicitly based on the assumption that the school’s achievement record speaks for itself, that based on the most recent data available at the time of the application in June 2006, the school would be successful by simply continuing to implement the SABIS model, as the school expanded into high school. The assumption of a “firm foundation in the past” is based on the results from the fourth grade ELA and mathematics exams of 2004-05. However, as discussed above, aside from those fourth grade state results, students in grades 1-7 taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in 2004-05 were still below grade-level in both subjects. More importantly, in contrast to the fourth-grade-only data, the 2005-06 results for students participating in the state’s 3-8 testing program showed a low level of performance in both ELA and math, as well as continued performance below grade level on the ITBS test.

Based on a review of the ICSS curriculum for grades 8-12 at the time of the renewal visit, the Institute requested that SABIS provide further detail. In response, SABIS provided an amended and more comprehensive curriculum document in support of the renewal application. From the additional submission, the Institute concluded that the curriculum for grades 8-12 is generally appropriate for, complimentary to, and consistent with, the school’s mission and the proposed educational program. However, the Institute determined that many grades and subjects do not have complete content or skills listings and there are inconsistencies in format and presentation. Because of the gaps, the document does not *demonstrate* complete alignment with the state performance standards.

Each curriculum section begins with a complete rendition of the New York State Standards relevant to the content area. While this is helpful to the reviewer and demonstrates that the applicant is familiar with the Standards, this approach does not add any credence to the contention of the applicant that the curriculum is in alignment with the standards. In fact, it begs the question: if the standards, key ideas, and performance indicators are in evidence, why did the applicant not more clearly demonstrate alignment?

The information provided is overwhelming for the reviewer and provides limited utility for day-to-day practitioners in a school. The extreme variation in detail and format is evident in every section. The section for science can serve as one example. The portion of the section dedicated to eighth grade science is nearly 50 pages in length and includes any and all topics across three fields of science. Grades 9-12 are covered in eight pages.

Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in presentation, however, the documents do include a concise description of curriculum development and implementation. There is strong evidence that the curriculum is comprehensive, integrated, sequenced, and spiraled as represented by the curriculum materials made available at the time of the renewal visit. In addition, supporting materials included in SABIS's submission indicate that its curriculum development efforts are the result of a deliberate and comprehensive process.

Aside from these qualities, however, the material is not a useful tool for the classroom practitioner and administrative staff who are responsible, and will be held accountable, for student performance on State Performance Assessments (e.g., Regents exams). The curriculum documents do not demonstrate and define all of the areas of the curriculum that align to the New York State Performance Standards; in addition, the areas that do not align are not user friendly. One would assume that an instructor would not be able to recognize the alignment as presented and would not be able to use them as pacing charts for grades 8-12 or as complements to the school's periodic assessments.

Given the challenges teachers faced in executing the SABIS program in grades K-8, the inconsistency with which the model was implemented and the low level of student performance, the plans for a high school in the next charter period are not deemed to be reasonable, feasible, and achievable.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for the Governance Structure</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</p>
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In general, the school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter. In the application for subsequent renewal, the school provided an amended set of legally sufficient by-laws and the board was clear on the import of the changes. The school has a clear Code of Ethics, which details the expected conduct of school stakeholders as does article X, section 4 of its by-laws (for officers and trustees). The School Board Organization Chart submitted with the renewal application is consistent with the school's by-laws. Responses to interview questions and other evidence, including questions regarding oversight of the school's management company, demonstrate that the school's governance model is sustainable for a three year renewal term.

Benchmark 4D Fiscal & Facility Plans	4 D The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.
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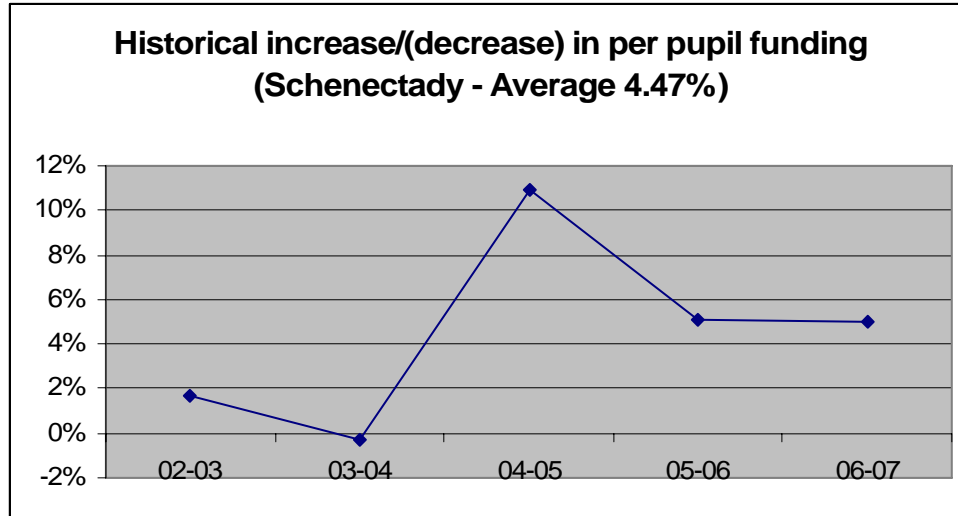
The school has successfully operated in a fiscally sound manner as it has grown to its current grade configuration (K-8) and is likely to continue to do so assuming continued enrollment demand. The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period, but will need to modify the plan slightly to eliminate the addition of high school grades. The plan assumes that the school would expand slowly into high school; having just 50 students at the high school level in 2007-08 and adding just 50 more students the next year. Institute staff has estimated that the decrease in revenue from eliminating the high school grades will be largely offset by a combination of reduced variable expenses, higher than estimated per pupil revenue and the school's stable financial condition at the start of the new charter period. 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 its approved enrollment and established per pupil amounts.

Based on its most recent student application period, the school has demonstrated a sufficient level of enrollment demand to meet the projected enrollment in the plan for grades K-8. Historically, students have returned to the school at a high rate from one year to the next, which should assist the school in reaching its enrollment goals. However, while the school has consistently had a wait list, the list has been small. For example, last spring there was no waiting list at all in five of nine grades to be served.

The school's fiscal plan projects a modest increase in its financial position over the proposed renewal charter period and includes no reliance on fundraising. Subsequent to its renewal application, the school received a state Charter School Stimulus Fund grant for \$300,000 to offset part of its facility acquisition and renovation costs thereby improving the school's overall financial condition.

The school's fiscal plan estimates increases in per pupil revenue of one percent per year. While the projected increases are not assured, this increase is substantially less than the historical average increase over the life of the school (approximately 4.5 percent). In addition, the 2006-2007 actual per pupil amount the school is receiving is about 3 percent higher than the amount used in the plan. As a result, estimated per pupil revenues in future years are likely to be understated. Also, the school makes other conservative assumptions, including anticipating significantly higher estimated employee benefit costs than it has historically incurred.

The school has established a track record of meeting its financial obligations including a period during which its per pupil revenue had declined slightly from the previous year (2003-04). Presented below is the per-pupil funding increases and decreases over the life of the school. While the school attracts students from several districts, the vast majority of students are residents of the Schenectady City School District. As a result, changes in per pupil funding are shown for Schenectady only for simplicity purposes.



Generally, the school’s plan makes reasonable assumptions with a few exceptions. For example, an assumed increase in federal Title I funding is at odds with the trend of less money going to New York State for federal programs. This example and other exceptions are not considered material to the overall soundness of the plan. The school’s board and educational service provider have provided close scrutiny of the school’s fiscal performance and are expected to continue to do so in the future.

The final version of Institute renewal reports should be broadly shared by the school with the entire school community. The reports will be posted on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm. Further, detailed information about the renewal process—from a summary overview for parents to the full set of Renewal Benchmarks (including the specific elements of each benchmark)—are available at www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.