

Validation Study For
SCHOOLS THAT CAN
HARBOR SCIENCE & ARTS CHARTER SCHOOL
NEW YORK

By

Jay Gottlieb, Ph.D.

Formerly Bill Traylor Institute for Inner City Education

September 1, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

VALIDATION STUDY REPORT

APPENDICES

A. CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

B. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

INTRODUCTION

Schools That Can (STC) is a national network of unaffiliated safe, high achieving schools located in inner cities and serving a largely poor minority population of students. Harbor Science and Art Charter School, Harlem, New York, has been identified as one of these high-performing schools. As more schools are identified, they are included in the network subject to a validation of their education program. The network aims to celebrate, support and promote these schools' accomplishments. The entire list of criteria for inclusion into the network appears in Appendix A at the rear of this document.

After a school has been identified and initially vetted by Schools That Can representatives the actual validation begins. The validation process for each school is consistent, subject to variations in teachers' and school's schedules and parent availability. Typically the process includes the following steps:

- Two to three weeks before a site visit, administrators are mailed a one-page parent survey to be completed by a representative 15%-20% sample of parents and a one-page survey to be completed by all teachers. These survey forms are collected at the time of the site visit.
- Each site visit typically lasts for an entire school day, or close to that amount of time. Depending upon scheduling considerations, the visit begins with a brief meeting with the school administrator, who provides the visitor with the schedule for the day as well as any published or printed information about the school. Classes are then visited for about 20-30 minutes each when instruction is occurring. Usually five to six classes are visited. Classroom management styles, techniques for behavior management and nature and style of instruction are observed (e.g., whole class, small group, lecturing, modeling, active or passive learning requirements)) Time is allotted to interview teachers individually, although because of time constraints teachers are occasionally interviewed in small groups. Often but not always, a sample of curriculum materials is collected. Parents are interviewed either at the beginning or end of the visit, depending upon availability, and these interviews focus on their satisfaction with the program and why they sent their children to the school as opposed to their local neighborhood school.
- Academic performance data for the schools are then downloaded from the city or State website. Comparable data for neighboring schools, the entire city, and the state are also downloaded for comparison purposes. Occasionally, some schools do not participate in the state assessment process either because the state does not allow them to participate or because they opt not to. These schools invariably administer alternative standardized test data, and these data are used and compared to national norms the particular assessment device and/or are evaluated for performance over time.

- An exit interview is usually held with the school leader at the end of the day to provide him/her with a brief and general overview of the results.
- Information from the classroom observations, interviews and academic performance are then analyzed and a report is produced within two weeks of the visit.

This report provides results of observations, interviews of parents, administrators, and teachers, and a review and analysis of academic achievement data to support the inclusion of Harbor Science and Art Charter School in the STC network.

HARBOR SCIENCE AND ART CHARTER SCHOOL

The Harbor Science and Arts Charter School (Harbor School) is located on the Upper East Side of New York City and located in Community School District 4 of the New York City Department of Education. The mission of the Harbor school is to create a learning environment where children and adults are engaged together in the learning process, where children use technology to support a hands-on curriculum that integrates math, science, and technology and where all students are held to high academic standards in a non-competitive, supportive environment. The physical plant is an old, well-maintained structure that had once been used as an orphanage, and it has the breadth of recreational facilities that would be expected of a facility where children once lived. There is a large gymnasium, a beautiful swimming pool, and an exercise room. The cafeteria was functional and well run but somewhat Spartan.

The school serves students in grades 1 through 8. The school is divided into a lower unit, encompassing grades 1-4 and an upper unit housing grades 5-8. School uniforms are required. The school's hours are 8:30 AM to 2:50 PM, daily.

Leadership. The administrator of the school is in her second year. She came to the school from a local public school where she served as an assistant principal. When she came to Harbor school she recruited several teachers. These teachers think very highly of the principal, and all spoke of frequent and helpful supervision either by the principal or by the school dean, who serves as chief disciplinarian, among other roles.

All teachers interviewed acknowledged the importance of professional development and credited the Urban Education Exchange with providing needed skills to effectively present the curriculum to students. This organization originally formed in the public school where the principal had previously worked. A three-day training session during the summer was cited by each teacher as highly effective. In addition, the personnel from the Urban Education Exchange offer sessions to teachers, available on Tuesdays of each week for the entire school day. Two of the four teachers interviewed cited the emphasis placed on maintaining a seamless transition in curriculum content across grade levels as one outcome of the training. The emphasis on transitions increases the likelihood that students master the skills they will need in the next grade.

Instruction. Interviews and classroom observations, especially the latter, revealed a split in quality between the lower and upper schools. Instruction at the lower grades was variable. There were examples of excellent instruction and examples of less stellar practices. In contrast, middle school instruction was consistently excellent, aided by small class size of less than 15 students.

Two teachers staffed the lower grade level classes and class size was in the low 20's. Most teachers at both levels indicated that the majority of instruction occurs in a large group format, with 70% - 80% of their instruction occurring in whole class groupings. Teachers also indicated that they use differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning abilities in their classes. There was considerable variety in the differentiation approaches that teachers indicated they employ, and their approaches appeared to be more sophisticated than at the other schools. One teacher differentiated instruction primarily according to students' learning styles, e.g., visual, kinesthetic, while others differentiated through their grouping strategies, while still others modified their lessons by using graphic organizers, writing checklists, and rubrics.

The school has a child study team that meets either weekly or bi-weekly, depending upon the need. The child study team serves as a sounding board for various issues about instruction or about the needs of individual students. Teachers serve on the child study team on a rotating basis. Some students who need additional assistance are sent to the special education teacher.

The consistently high quality of instruction at the middle school could account for the fact that the state assessment scores improved to the level of or better than the comparisons schools. However, the principal is relatively new to the school and it is very likely that the quality that currently exists at the upper grades will shortly permeate the lower grades as well.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of the Harbor Science and Art charter school are as follows:

**Table 13
Demographics for Harbor Science and Art Charter School**

Students enrolled	209
Lower school	127
Middle school	82
High school	0
Grade levels served	1-8
Percent white students	0
Percent African-American students	81
Percent Hispanic students	19
Percent eligible for free lunch	80
Percent mobility rate	3
Percent receiving special education	9

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Harbor School's performance on New York State assessments in 4th and 8th grades is presented in Table 14.

Table 14
Three-Year Performance on State Assessments

Organization	Reading 2002	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2002	Math 2003	Math 2004
4 th grade						
Harbor Charter	41	57	23	38	57	42
Community School District 4	36	39	40	47	62	64
New York City	47	53	50	52	67	68
New York State	63	65	62	68	79	79
8 th grade						
Harbor Charter	N/A	18	22	N/A	25	38
Community School District 4	19	23	21	20	23	27
New York City	30	32	37	30	35	44
New York State	44	45	47	48	51	58

The data for three years present a variable picture. At fourth grade, Harbor outperformed Community School District 4 for reading in 2002 and 2003, but not in 2004. Harbor performed more poorly than CSD 4 in math for each of the years. In 8th grade Harbor improved at a greater rate than CSD 4 schools in both reading and math.

CRITERION 3: VALUED BY PARENTS

Parents' ratings on a scale indicating the extent of their satisfaction with the school their children attend were as follows:

Table 15
Parent Satisfaction

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
Harbor Science and Art Charter	0	0	2 (8%)	21 (81%)	3 (12%)

As with all other schools in the network, parents are satisfied with their children's school.

Summary

The strengths of the program are its:

- Strong leadership, with the administrator enjoying the confidence of her staff.
- Excellent instruction at the middle school level
- Incorporation of community resources into the academic curriculum
- Middle school achievement relative to lower school achievement

A recommendation is for the school to strive for greater consistency in instruction at the lower grades. Although some of the instruction was equal in quality to instruction at the middle grades, some of the instruction was not. Better instruction would lead to improved assessment outcomes.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

SCHOOLS THAT CAN member schools provide families and students from economically disadvantaged urban areas with an education based on the following criteria:

- 1. Located in the inner-city and primarily serving an economically disadvantaged population of students that are representative of its community, with at least 50% eligible for free lunch**
- 2. Striving to achieve superior levels of academic performance as measured by objective assessments and outcomes**
- 3. Emphasizing character based education**
- 4. Providing a safe, disruption-free, non discriminatory environment, where teachers can teach and children can learn**
- 5. Valued by parents and actively engaged within their communities**
- 6. Characterized by dedicated and effective leadership**
- 7. Attaining a high level of sustainability**
- 8. Willing to share “best practices” and assist other STC network schools.**

Appendix B

Biography

Jay Gottlieb is a professor of educational psychology in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University. He received his doctorate in 1972 from Yeshiva University in New York City and has spent the past thirty years conducting teaching and conducting research and evaluations in urban schools. His research focuses on the education of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Dr. Gottlieb has served as a special education expert for federal and state court cases involving special education, studied special education in the Oslo, Norway public schools, and participated in the drafting of reports to re-organize special and remedial education in the New York City schools. He has published 90 articles in various professional sources and has been the principal investigator of about two dozen research grants and contracts as well as director of several training grants, including one to train doctoral level researchers in applied research. Dr. Gottlieb was a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of numerous other professional organizations, and at various points in his career, served on the editorial boards of half dozen professional journals. Dr. Gottlieb also served two terms as and elected public school trustee in his community.