

SCHOOLS THAT CAN*

Validation Report

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

BOSTON, MA

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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. Neighborhood House (Charter School), Boston, 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 Neighborhood House in the STC network.

Neighborhood House Charter School-Boston

History and Mission. Founded in 1995, the Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS), a pre K-8 school, aims to offer a quality education to a diverse community of Boston children. NHCS accomplishes this mission as a neighborhood-based school that integrates education with social services and health care programs for the benefit of students and their families that otherwise have limited educational opportunities. This year, the school moved into a larger –and very impressive-- facility and will be able to accommodate substantially more students, almost double its current number. Because it is a public charter school, NHCS does not charge tuition and accepts students on a first come first serve basis. When the number of applicants exceeds the number of available seats, a lottery is held.

NHCS was founded with the vision that low-income urban children could perform at levels comparable to their suburban peers if supported by a school that combines a rigorous academic program with social and health care services. The school's mission is rooted in the objectives of the charter school movement: to provide more choices in public education, encourage more competition among public schools, and spur innovation. By providing small classes (capped at 22), after school and summer enrichment programs, and specialists in the arts, literacy and writing, NHCS aims to narrow the gap between students in urban and suburban environments. One measure of the school's success is that it currently has a waiting list of more than 2,100 students. Another measure is that about one-third of the students who attend live outside of the immediate Dorchester and Roxbury neighborhoods of Boston where the school is located. The school's reputation transcends its immediate geographic service area.

Students. The school currently (SY 2004-2005) enrolls 242 students, about three-fourths of whom are members of a minority group. About two-thirds of the students qualify as coming from low-income homes and about 5% qualify for designation as students for whom English is a second language. About half the student population have a sibling who attends NHCS. More detail regarding student demographics appears in Table 15 below.

Table 15
Demographics for Neighborhood House Charter School

Students enrolled	242
Pre K	22
Lower school (K-5)	154
Middle school (6-8)	66
Percent Caucasian	26
Percent African American	53
Percent Hispanic	9
Percent Other	12
Percent eligible for free/reduced price lunch	about two-thirds low income
Percent mobility rate	N/A
Percent special education	16
Attendance rate	N/A

Graduates of NCHS attend a variety of high schools, including parochial, charter and independent schools. As an example, during the current school year, 2005-2006, 21 of the 23 students in the graduating class had been accepted as of the site visit in early May. As in prior years, pilot high schools, or theme based schools, attracted the largest number of students, followed by charter and independent schools. This year, four of the 21 students were accepted by one of the exam-based Boston Public Schools, e.g., Boston Latin School.

Administration and Teachers. NHCS employed 42.3 full-time equivalent staff in 2004-2005, including 31.3 FTE classroom teachers, teaching specialists, and student support staff members. There are also six administrators, two administrative support people, and three staff members disseminating effective practices.

Parent satisfaction. Survey responses were scored from 41 parents to the questionnaire described earlier in the narrative. In Table 16, a tabulation of parent responses to the question, “*Overall, this school provides a sound education for its students,*” appears.

Table 16
Parental Satisfaction (in Percent)

Overall, this school provides a sound education for its students

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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68	27	5	0	0
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The tabular presentation displayed in Table 16 indicates overwhelming parental satisfaction with the school’s program: 95% agree or strongly agree that their children are receiving a sound education.

Curriculum. The NHCS curriculum is designed to help each student succeed academically. While the teachers and staff develop the specific curriculum, the topics included in the curriculum follow the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Learning Standards taught at each grade level in the core academic areas. NHCS has been providing Spanish instruction since 1999. While students in grades 3-5 receive instruction in Spanish, only the middle school students receive report card grades in the subject. In addition to traditional core academic subjects, NHCS offers instruction in technology, creative arts, including both music and art, and in core values. Core values are designed to help youngsters grow up to become honest and productive members of society. The core values that are stressed in the curriculum include: caring, cooperation, justice, respect, effort, trustworthiness and responsibility. Lower school students who demonstrate mastery of the core values are recognized at a weekly school Town Meeting. Middle school students are recognized with a Citizenship Award.

Academic performance data resulting from, among other factors, the school curriculum appears in Table 17.

Table 17
Neighborhood House Performance on State Assessments in Relation to Boston
Public Schools and Commonwealth of Massachusetts: SY 2005

Grade	Testing Entity	Subject	Percent Proficient or Advanced		
3	Neighborhood House	Reading	55		
			3	Boston Public	
			Schools	Reading	31
3	Massachusetts		62		
4	Neighborhood House	Eng. Language Arts	50		
4	Boston Public Schools	Eng. Language Arts	25		
4	Massachusetts	Eng. Language Arts	50		
4	Neighborhood House	Math	38		
			4	Boston Public	
			Schools	Math	21
			4	Massachusetts	Math
5	Neighborhood House	Science & Technology	55		
			5	Boston Public	
			Schools	Science &	
			Technology	17	
			5	Massachusetts	Science & Technol
6	Neighborhood House	Math	21		
6	Boston Public Schools	Math	23		
			6	Massachusetts	Math
7	Neighborhood House	Eng. Language Arts	100		
7	Boston Public Schools	Eng. Language Arts	44		
			7	Massachusetts	Eng. Language Art
8	Neighborhood House	Math	75		
8	Boston Public Schools	Math	23		
			8	Massachusetts	Math
8	Neighborhood House	Science & Technology	60		
			8	Boston Public	
			Schools	Science &	
			Technology	10	
			8	Massachusetts	Science & Technol

Inspection of the data in Table 17 reveals that in almost all instances, students at Neighborhood House outperform their counterparts who attend Boston Public Schools. With only a couple of exceptions, students at NHCS also exceeded Statewide averages. Note that in 8th grade assessments, immediately prior to students entering high school, Neighborhood House students score substantially better than their peers attending Boston Public Schools as well as their peers Statewide. Neighborhood House students achieve proficiency or better at almost twice the rate of their peers across the Commonwealth.

Recommendations

The teachers make very good use of collective approval to support children's learning. In one lesson that I observed, the sixth grade teacher orchestrated a class-wide approval system --collective handclapping-- for a student who correctly answered a difficult question. The same technique can be used to manage misbehavior, when it occurs. A classwide approval system to reinforce appropriate behavior is an empirically validated approach that is very often effective in reducing the frequency of disruptive behavior, especially for younger children. Although teachers, in general, had excellent control over classroom behavior, this was not uniformly the case in all classes. Training in applied behavior analytic techniques, or another form of behavior management, would pay dividends. More effective behavior management strategies might reduce the need for in-house suspensions.

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.