

Validation Study For
SCHOOLS THAT CAN
TREY WHITFIELD SCHOOL

BROOKLYN, NY

by

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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. Trey Whitfield School, Brooklyn, NY, 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 Trey Whitfield School in the STC network.

TREY WHITFIELD SCHOOL

The Trey Whitfield School was founded in 1983 and re-located to its current space in September, 2004.. The school serves a pre-K through 8th grade population. The school adheres to New York State standards at all grade levels. Trey Whitfield charges a nominal tuition of \$350 monthly. School uniforms are required. School hours are 8:30 AM until 3:00 PM.

Observations and interviews at the Trey Whitfield School across the spectrum of grade levels indicated excellent instruction and high expectations in all classes. In general, the level of instruction, especially at the lower grades, appeared to be about one year advanced over public schools. First graders were reading relatively fluently, repeatedly encouraged by their teachers to make the effort even if they were uncertain about the correct response.

Leadership. Two central administrators who administer the school provide leadership at Trey Whitfield. One of the administrators also serves as a de facto counselor to students and is responsible for inculcating sound values and advising on and modeling appropriate modes of behavior for students. Day-to-day instructional supervision resides in four supervising, or lead, teachers, clustered by grade levels (e.g., grades K-2, 3-5, etc.). Teachers turn to these lead teachers for assistance. The lead teachers are experienced and knowledgeable, and the classroom teachers are highly appreciative of the assistance they provide. According to teachers, assistance is frequent and helpful. Lead teachers also have classroom responsibilities.

Frequent assessments of students' performance are made. A key feature of the curriculum that aids in students' success, according to teachers, is the emphasis on curriculum transitions between grade levels. Considerable planning occurs to ensure that transitions are seamless and students have mastered the prerequisite for the next higher grade. Expectations for students are high, and teachers praise effort as well as attainment.

The training teachers received to implement the curriculum did not appear to be systematic across the school but varied by content area. A science teacher mentioned that she attended an in-depth workshop offered by the New York State Education Department, while a teacher at a lower grade referenced a reading workshop provided by the New York City Department of Education. A third teacher offered what was a recurring theme of all teachers interviewed, that supervisors provided the necessary mentoring to implement curricula. When teachers need assistance, they approach their supervisors. Four supervisors serve the school, providing instructional leadership which teachers uniformly find helpful. Depending upon the teacher, supervisors are in their classes on a daily basis or less frequently, but teachers receive formal feedback on their instruction on a monthly basis.

Teachers interviewed were highly experienced, with between 5 and 28 years in classroom teaching experience. None of them was state certified, but one teacher mentioned that she was certified in Guyana.

Instruction. Instruction was uniformly excellent. The level of instruction, especially at the lower grades, appeared to be about one year above grade level, an estimate confirmed by the teachers. Lessons were clear, paced well, and actively involved students. Students who were off-task were redirected on-task by teachers. Direct observations of classrooms from 1st to 7th grades revealed a well-organized set of lessons that were motivating, well sequenced, where the goals of the lessons were clear and written on the chalkboard or otherwise hanging on the wall. Character education as a prerequisite for success in later life was heavily stressed. A level of positive emotional warmth between the students and teachers was palpable. The nature of the relationships became clear when the school administrator made a passing comment at the end of the day during the exit interview, sharing his desire for staff “who taught from the heart.” That is precisely what was occurring.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of the Trey Whitfield School are as follows:

**Table 10
Demographics for Trey Whitfield School**

Students enrolled	391
Lower school	266
Middle school	125
High school	0
Grade levels served	Pre K – 8
Percent white students	0
Percent African-American students	99
Percent Hispanic students	1
Percent eligible for free lunch	N/A
Percent mobility rate	3
Percent receiving special education	N/A

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Trey Whitfield school participates in the New York State English language Arts (ELA) and math assessments administered annually to students in grades 4 and 8. Their performance for the past three years is displayed below.

Table 11
Performance on State Assessments

Organization	Reading 2002	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2002	Math 2003	Math 2004
4 th grade						
Trey Whitfield	71	83	76	85	98	90
Community School District 19	34	41	37	34	56	61
New York City	47	53	50	52	67	68
New York State	63	65	62	68	79	79
8 th grade						
Trey Whitfield	58	46	62	38	53	83
Community School District 19	16	20	26	14	19	33
New York City	30	32	37	30	35	44
New York St	44	45	47	48	51	58

Inspection of the data appearing in Table 8 indicate consistent year-after-year superiority of Trey Whitfield students over their Community School District neighbors and over New York City as a whole. This level of achievement is obtained despite the fact that East New York, the location of Trey Whitfield, is one of the poorest areas in New York City and despite the fact that the pupil cost of educating a student at Trey Whitfield is less than 40% the cost for a New York City public school student.

One other academic criterion attests to the high caliber of student at Trey Whitfield School. Each year, about 6-8 graduating 8th graders out of a class of 25-30, depending upon the year are recruited and offered full scholarships to prestigious New England boarding schools.

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 12
Parent Satisfaction

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
Trey Whitfield School	0	0	0	3 (27%)	8 (73%)

All parents who responded were satisfied with Trey Whitfield. It must be noted, however, that responses were obtained from only 11 parents.

Summary

Trey Whitfield School is located in an economically depressed section of Brooklyn, New York. By focusing heavily on academics and character education in equal measure, it produces a high percentage of students who attend high status secondary schools. The administration and teaching staff are totally committed to the students, a fact evidenced by the nature of interpersonal relationships that were observed.

The strengths of the program are its:

- High academic test scores
- Emphasis on appropriate modes of behavior in school and out of school
- Placement of a high percentage of graduates in high status boarding schools
- A teaching faculty that bonds with students
- Good and frequent supervision of teaching staff
- Ample, new physical plant

Recommendations for Trey Whitfield School include the need to upgrade its athletic facilities for adolescents, especially boys. Also, more consistent and uniform professional development would enable teachers to apply more current "scientific" approaches to pedagogy than are currently used. Although the instruction is excellent because of the availability of supervision, better professional development opportunities would result in the staff having to rely less on their supervisors.

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