

**Validation Report For
SCHOOLS THAT CAN***

**UNITED ACADEMY
NEWARK, NJ**

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. United Academy, Newark, NJ, 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 United Academy in the STC network.

UNITED ACADEMY

United Academy is a private school dedicated to the educational, emotional, and social development of students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Offering a challenging curriculum in a secure and disciplined environment, the school began operation in 1951 in response to parent demand. Individual attention is provided during a full day of classroom teaching, supervised study, and extracurricular activity. A foster grandparent program supplements teachers' instruction. The school employs 14 teachers and two administrators. The school does not receive any public funding. Tuition for an individual student is \$5,000 annually; however, many students receive scholarship assistance (average student cost is about \$3,000). The school also operates a summer camp for students, supported by a community-based organization. The organization also supports after school programming during the academic year. School hours are 7:10 AM until 6:00 PM. A scheduling mix-up during the site visit required last-minute shifts in teaching to accommodate the observations. The day scheduled for the site visit was normally a day reserved for assessments. As a result, teachers were asked at the last minute to teach provide instruction they did not anticipate. This undoubtedly influenced the instruction that was observed. Only two classes were observed at this school.

Leadership. The administrator has been at United Academy in this capacity for about 15 years. Several minutes before the interview for this evaluation, the principal learned that a parcel of land the mayor had promised to the school had been sold to a developer. The school clearly needs more space, corridors were cramped and office space severely limited. The principal was dismayed, and her emotional state may have influenced her comments.

The gist of the principal's view is the school is like home, available to support and nurture children. Three or four professional development workshops are provided annually. Teachers are also encouraged to attend the annual state teacher convention. The climate instilled by the principal, who is emotionally attached to her staff, is that teachers should go out of their way to help children in any way needed. Some teachers who were interviewed echoed this sentiment. The principal believes that all teachers do go the extra mile for the children and that they do their jobs well. Although there is no teacher tenure, few, if any, teachers are dismissed, and there is no merit pay. The principal observes teachers twice yearly. Overall leadership style can be described as maternalistic.

Instruction. Instruction was very good considering the last minute changes that were made. A first grade teacher was involved in a lesson on handwriting and students were actively engaged. A few disruptions were evident but ceased shortly without teacher intervention. An eighth grade class was deeply involved in a discussion of Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy of nonviolent resistance.

Teachers had effective control of their classes. However, the topics observed were not typically included in state assessments, and no information on the quality of reading and math instruction was obtained during the observations.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of the United Academy are as follows:

Table 16
United Academy Demographics

Students enrolled	192
Lower school	132
Middle school	60
High school	0
Grade levels served	PreK-8
Percent white students	0
Percent African-American students	96
Percent Hispanic students	4
Percent eligible for free lunch	70
Percent mobility rate	13
Percent receiving special education	2

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A. Academic performance-State Assessments

State assessment data were available for only one year, and these scores appear in table 17.

Table 17
Performance on State Assessments

Organization	Reading 2002	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2002	Math 2003	Math 2004
4 th grade						
United Academy	N/A	43	N/A	N/A	43	N/A
Newark	58	53	62	36	43	54
New Jersey	79	77	82	79	68	72
8 th grade						
United Academy		43			43	
Newark	40	43	43	37	26	36
New Jersey	73	73	72	58	56	62

B. Academic Performance-California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)

United relies most heavily on CTBS assessment scores, and these scores indicate that the school performs substantially above national norms, as indicated in Table 18. Results of the CTBS assessments administered annually by the school reveal the following results, by grade level. Data are expressed as average scores in national percentile metric.

Table 18
Performance on California Test of Basic Skills

Grade level	Reading 2002	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2002	Math 2003	Math 2004
1	79	79	75	88	84	86
2	71	72	71	80	82	82
3	69	68	67	72	69	77
4	67	66	66	67	68	67
5	76	68	73	75	77	80
6	65	68	68	78	74	80
7	79	73	63	74	72	65
8	71	70	76	76	80	79

It is important to interpret these scores against those of the Newark schools. Newark has one of the most depressed school systems in the country, and the fact that students in United School perform as well as they do is testament to the rigor of the academic program and the quality of teaching.

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 19
Parent Satisfaction

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
United Academy	0	0	0	0	19 (100%)

Results indicate that all parents who responded were very satisfied with the school. These results confirm the perceptions expressed by a couple of parents who were interviewed.

Summary

The strengths of the program are its:

- Excellent and enthusiastic parent support
- Stable leadership
- Well-developed behavior management strategies

A recognized recommendation, one which the school has been working on, is for better academic space. The current building is small, cramped, with inadequate classroom and corridor space.

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.