



## **NEW SCHOOLS FOR NEW ORLEANS**

### **School Review Process: Lessons Learned from the Knowledge is Power Program and the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence**

June 2007

## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOOL

This case study was prepared by FSG Social Impact Advisors. FSG is a nonprofit consulting firm that provides guidance to foundations, corporations, nonprofits, and other public sector entities on issues of strategy, evaluation, and operations. FSG was commissioned by NewSchools Venture Fund to document “promising practices” of portfolio ventures in a format that could be shared across the NewSchools portfolio. To complete this case study, FSG conducted background research on New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), The New York City Center for Charter School Excellence (The Center) and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Interviews were conducted with Matt Candler, CEO of NSNO, Glenn Liebeck, Director of School Leadership Development at The Center, Heather Caudill, Director of Quality and School Assessment at The Center, Jeff Rutel, Director of Instruction and Evaluation at KIPP, and three school leaders who have participated in The Center School Review. Jim Peyser of the NewSchools Venture Fund provided additional context on New Schools for New Orleans.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We hope that reading this case study sparks conversations about how the practices highlighted here relate to your own organization. We have developed the questions below to help guide these discussions. We encourage you to keep them in mind as you read through the case study and to refer back to them as you reflect on the case study’s implications for your own organization.

1. How do you assess the performance of individual schools within your organization? Do you have a way of finding and fixing problems?
2. Who oversees the assessment of schools within your organization?
3. Is there a forum for teachers and principals to discuss the results of these assessments? Is there a mechanism in place to develop improvement plans based on the assessments’ findings?
4. If you were to implement a school review process, would you do this in house or would you outsource the development of such a program? What are the pros and cons of each approach?
5. What resources would be required to develop such a process in house? What resources would be required if you chose to outsource the development? Are these resources available?

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

With the advent of high-stakes testing and No Child Left Behind, schools are under increasing pressure to meet student performance and school improvement goals. Charter schools have the additional need to meet their authorizer requirements to ensure their charter is renewed. For these reasons, charter management organizations (CMOs) need to ensure schools in their network are operating effectively and that instruction is of the highest quality. However, many principals and CMO central office staff do not have the time, expertise, or access to an independent third party that can thoroughly assess school performance on a regular basis and develop plans to address what needs to be improved.

*We want to have a third party measure what we do against accepted benchmarks so it's not just our school saying we're the best. It is also our goal as an organization to teach our schools and staff to be self-evaluative.*

- KIPP

In response to this dilemma, some CMOs and third-party organizations have developed review processes to help schools continuously improve. This case explores two different models of conducting school reviews: The New York City Center for Charter School Excellence (The Center), an independent nonprofit that conducts reviews of charter schools in the New York City area and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), a network of charter schools that conducts reviews of its own schools.

*It's unhealthy to get feedback only once a year from an authorizer, but it is very helpful to get regular feedback from outside eyes once you are a school leader.*

- Principal, NYC

Both The Center and KIPP contract with education consultancies that help them develop the evaluation tools and conduct the evaluations:

*I think having as many people evaluate you as possible is key. Different people see different things.*

- Principal, NYC

- SchoolWorks: A small Boston-based quality review consulting firm that works with charters, authorizers, school districts and departments of education to “measure current performance, explore strategies for improvement and implement the solutions best suited to local needs.”<sup>1</sup> SchoolWorks has helped both The Center and KIPP in their review processes.

- Cambridge Education LLC (CE)<sup>2</sup>: A US based -division of a consulting firm based in England that provides many services, including conducting school reviews. It has helped develop the review tools for both The Center and KIPP. Consultants from CE participate in some of the KIPP reviews.

While there is not conclusive research on whether or how school reviews lead to improved student achievement, school reviews are believed to be an effective school improvement practice. This case is relevant

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.schoolworks.com>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.camb-ed.com/school-services/school-services.asp> Note: In 2003, Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) and Cambridge Education Consultants (CEC) merged to form Cambridge Education LLC (CE).

to any CMO interested in conducting reviews of schools in its network, or any charter school interested in how an external review might help it improve practices to drive gains in student achievement.

## THIRD PARTY EVALUATIONS: THE NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

### Overview

The Center was founded in 2004 to “stimulate the supply of high-quality charter schools and support ongoing student excellence in all NYC charter schools, impacting the effectiveness of public education.”<sup>3</sup> The Center has conducted 40 charter school reviews since 2005. The reviews currently focus on school culture, school leadership, and teaching and assessment, and will eventually expand to incorporate governance and operations reviews.

*The low-performers that we work with fall into 2 categories – those ready to go through organizational change, and those where there’s some kind of resistance to change. We want to work with the former.*

- New York City Center for Charter School Excellence

The Center’s focus is on low-performing schools. However, staff emphasizes that they only work with organizations willing to change. The Center conducts two reviews per year for new schools and anywhere between one and three reviews per year for existing schools. The first review takes place in the fall and is designed to establish a baseline for growth and improvement. Subsequent reviews explore areas that have not been mastered or that the school indicated it wanted to revisit.

School reviews are conducted by Center staff and consultants, all of whom have experience in charter schools. Each consultant serves six to seven schools and is responsible for building support for the process, collecting documents, and customizing and overseeing the reviews. To prepare for the role, each consultant attends three to four training sessions run by The Center staff.

### Relationship with Authorizers

These reviews are designed to be distinct from authorizer reviews, with a focus on collaborative coaching that helps schools improve rather than a formal visit that could result in a revoked charter. The Center works closely with authorizers, several of whom have reviewed the Center’s tools. Matt Candler, current CEO of New Schools for New Orleans and formerly at The Center notes that “*the ability to do reviews was tied strongly to having credibility with the authorizer. As a middle man, we have access to more information than either the school or the authorizer, which gives us more credibility with schools. Schools are willing to have us do friendly, developmental reviews because they know we know what the authorizer will look for in formal reviews, and they trust that we won’t share all of their weaknesses with the authorizer.*” Building relationships with authorizers remains a challenge, however, and The Center staff admits, “*We haven’t done as good a job as we would like of building relationships with authorizers.*”

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nycchartercenter.org>

## Customizing Reviews

In each review, The Center staff works with school leaders and staff to evaluate school culture, school leadership and teaching and assessment. Within each category, the staff has defined three levels of priorities tied to student needs and achievement. As The Center staff explains, *“If you can’t get kids to sit in a seat, you’re not going to be able to work on high-level questioning. Level 1 would be getting kids to sit in seats.”* The Center has rubrics that clearly define each level (see Toolkit for *Level 1 Teaching & Assessment Rubric and Level 1 Leadership Rubric*). Most baseline reviews focus on Level 1.

The Center has developed hundreds of standard evaluation tools, many of which are “non-negotiable” baseline tools. For example, for the tool that measures student engagement, a “non-negotiable” is time spent on task. About 85% of each review uses the same tools. The other 15% of the review is customized to meet the school’s individual needs.

The Center staff spends about 20 hours preparing for each review. They talk to school leaders, collect documents, and customize tools. They will ask schools for areas that authorizers have highlighted as trouble spots, noting that *“anything the authorizer has nailed them on goes into the review.”* If it is a follow-up review, it will be based on areas previously identified as growth areas.

Little preparation work is required of the schools. As one principal commented, *“We don’t have to do a lot to prepare for reviews. Last year we did not have to do any preparation work for the review. This year, we had to send some documents and I helped create observation tools.”* Another principal remarked, *“No real work is required to prepare. The Center just needs to know our schedule and I need to determine who will participate in the review.”*

## How Reviews are Conducted

Each review lasts six hours (see sidebar) and is conducted by a team of three to four staff from The Center and three to four school staff.

Conducting short reviews minimizes disruption at the school site (see Toolkit for *Sample Agenda/Schedule*). The day begins with a 45-minute session, where staff from The Center interviews the leadership team and explains the tools (see Toolkit for *Sample Interview Questions*).

Time	Item
8:00	NYC CCE Team Arrives
8:15 – 9:00	Interview Leadership team and explanation of tools
9:00 – 11:00	Observe classrooms
11:00 – 11:30	Complete rubrics without teacher input – collect and total data from observations
11:30 – 12:15	Interview teachers and lunch
12:15 – 12:30	Complete rubrics – collect and total data from teacher interviews
12:30 – 1:30	Debrief

Then teams of two reviewers, one from The Center and one from the school, conduct 25-30-minute

Team	Focus Areas
1	Consistency/ tone and language/ clear objectives/ displayed work
2	Behavioral expectations (in-room and hallway)/ student accountability/ systems and routines
3	Rigor (lesson and overall)/ transitions (hallway and in-room)/ safety

classroom observations. The number of observations depends on the size of the school and the number of classrooms. Each team uses the same observation tools in each classroom and focuses on collecting specific, targeted data (see

sidebar). In teaching and learning, reviewers will look at things such as the amount of time students spend on task or the number of seconds a teacher gives a student to answer a question. In the cultural assessment, reviewers might count the duration of hallway transitions (see Toolkit Additional Documents for *Sample Observation Tools*).

After the observations, each team spends 30 minutes completing rubrics without teacher input. Then, The Center staff spends 45 minutes over lunch asking teachers the same questions they asked the leadership team in the morning. *“This helps us understand if there is a disconnect. We also ask them if there are any issues they’d like us to bring up with the leadership team.”* After lunch, the reviewers spend 25 minutes completing the rubrics, filling in information from the staff interviews, and discussing where they want to push the leadership team. The last hour of the day is a debrief with the leadership team, where The Center staff works with the school staff to go through the entire rubric and color code each element to signify which areas need improvement and which areas have been mastered (see Toolkit Additional Documents for *Sample Completed Rubrics*).

About 10 days after the review, the Center sends the school a written report identifying strengths and areas for improvement with evidence and recommendations (see Toolkit Additional Documents for *Sample Full Report*). In the conclusion, the report identifies three to four “big rocks,” or areas to focus on (see sidebar).

Culture	Leadership	Teaching and Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Academic Rigor</i> – Define and monitor academic rigor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Collaboration and Integration</i> – Increase support and structure of teacher collaboration sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Lesson Objectives</i> – Deepen lesson plans and make lesson objectives explicit in teaching</li> <li>• <i>Level of Engagement</i> – Challenge students at their appropriate developmental levels</li> <li>• <i>High Academic Expectations</i>- Pair this with the focus on rigor</li> </ul>

**Acting on Results**

The Center tries to conduct targeted reviews that will enable it to identify specific interventions. The Center provides grants of up to \$25,000 to help schools implement changes, will conduct follow-up reviews, and often provides informal ongoing support. Based on a school’s individual needs, The Center sometimes pays for a SchoolWorks consultant to provide coaching assistance on issues such as improving leadership or how to implement components of a school improvement plan. Beyond this, The Center is working on creating a menu of follow-up interventions.

*One piece of feedback we received from the review was that all our classes and teacher prep times were at the same time. The reviewers recommended that students have opportunities to learn different subjects at different times because some times of day are better for them. So we have now implemented a rotating schedule in middle and elementary school.*

- Principal, NYC

The reviews often result in school-level changes. As one school leader remarked, *“They gave us a grant to implement a data collection process, which enabled us to pay for teacher leaders to do assessments.”* There have been occasions where the review reveals very poor leadership. In that case, The Center staff will recommend to the

board that the principal be let go.

For some schools, the value lies in the observation tools themselves. As one principal remarked, *“Our school has found the tools really helpful in providing a framework for thinking about the technical aspects of teaching and leadership – this has permeated our school. This year we did peer evaluations using the same tool.”*

## EVALUATIONS OF SCHOOLS WITHIN A NETWORK: THE KNOWLEDGE IS POWER PROGRAM

### Overview

The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a network of free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public schools in under-resourced communities throughout the United States. The first school opened in 1994, and there are currently 52 KIPP schools in 16 states and Washington, D.C., serving more than 12,000 students.<sup>4</sup>

KIPP conducts three tiers of reviews.

- **Tier 1.** *New Schools Visits* focused on development for schools that are opening or have a change in leadership. These reviews have been conducted for two years.
- **Tier 2.** *Formal Second-Year Inspections* that evaluate operations, instruction, alignment with the KIPP model, and school culture. These reviews have been underway for many years and have more codified elements.
- **Tier 3.** *Fifth-Year Inspections* that are a developmental self study focused on sustainability. This specific review protocol was first implemented in the 2006-2007 school year.

First and foremost, the purpose of these reviews is to help school leaders improve their schools in ways that lead to higher student achievement. However, KIPP also uses the results from the evaluations in many other ways. KIPP staff uses review data to inform staff training. Results also inform resource allocation, enabling KIPP to provide additional support or interventions to struggling schools. Finally, some school leaders have used positive review data in grant applications.

KIPP conducts first year reviews using foundation staff, school leaders and Fisher Fellows (KIPP Principals in training). For the second- and fifth-year reviews, KIPP contracts with Cambridge Education, LLC (CE). KIPP has a full-time Director of Instruction and Evaluation, Jeff Rutel, who plays a critical role in the evaluations. Jeff spends a substantial amount of time on school visits and works with KIPP superintendents in cluster districts (where there is a group of KIPP schools in a given geography) to ensure they are on board with the process. Jeff also has regional directors to ensure that the review takes into account the individual characteristics of a cluster. In addition to Jeff's team, many other staff members are involved in the review analysis.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.kipp.org/>

At the school summit every August, everyone involved in the review process undergoes training, whether they have previously conducted a review or not. Participants discuss their own experience being inspected and try to tease out any biases they might have when conducting reviews. They also discuss confidentiality because, as Jeff notes, *“It is critical that what happens at a school visit stays at that school. It is essential that school leaders know the feedback is staying in-house.”*

## Customizing Reviews

KIPP generally approaches every school review the same way. However, for schools that are really struggling, KIPP conducts additional evaluations with a committee comprised of veteran school leaders. *“That’s a slightly elevated process that is separate from our other reviews.”*

KIPP will also scale the review based on whether a school is the only KIPP school in a geography or whether it is in a cluster with other KIPP schools. *“If there’s a cluster structure in place, the issues will be very different because we know they have a lot more support than an isolated school.”*

## How Reviews are Conducted

### Tier 1: New School Visits

These reviews are conducted when a new school opens or when there is a change in leadership. They take place within the first 16 weeks of a school’s fall opening so *“we can be proactive about what is happening.”* These reviews are designed to be more developmental than evaluative. *“There’s usually a huge disconnect between what a school leader believes is going on and what’s really going on. These visits are designed to tease out the gaps and calibrate what the school leader wants to happen.”*

The school leader fills out a self-evaluation beforehand, ranking the strengths and weaknesses of his leadership and school. Reviewers will look for evidence of what the school leader indicated on the self-evaluation. For example, *“If he says he has a high-functioning board, we go and talk to the board to ‘pressure test’ whether this is true.”*

*It’s great for Fellows to see what a new school looks like. It’s a very humbling experience for them. It’s very eye opening for them to see what’s actually involved in starting a school.*

- KIPP

The reviews are 2½ to 3 days long. The review team consists of three people, who are all practitioners: a veteran school leader, a Fisher Fellow (KIPP principal in training), and a regional director. The review team talks to the school leader about any issues he is having, takes a tour, and conducts classroom observations. The team might split into different classrooms based on areas of expertise. Or, if the team is in a new school with only one grade, it will conduct a group observation of the same class. *“We often have many people watch the same teacher so we are triangulating.”*

*We won’t say “your English instruction is terrible.” Rather, we’ll ask about the delivery of English instruction: “Why did you decide to use this delivery structure?” Asking questions is less intense, doesn’t put leaders on the defensive, and forces them to think at a high level about the decisions they have made.*

- KIPP

The review team looks for evidence of student learning and rigorous instruction. While it doesn’t use a consistent note-taking format, the team does meet several times during each visit to debrief on what

team members are observing and discuss what else they should look for. The team uses this time to calibrate across team members. *“I want to be sure that what I think of as excellence is the same as what everyone else on the team thinks of as excellence.”*

On the final day, the review team holds a two-hour feedback session with the school leader and, if the leader chooses, with a top teacher or academic dean. The district superintendent also attends the feedback session if the school is part of a cluster. This debrief is conversational, and all questions are based on the evidence collected during the observations.

The review team discusses what the school is doing well and why, helps the school staff identify two to three areas to focus on, makes recommendations about what resources might be helpful, and plans whatever follow-up might be needed. Although they ask school leaders what help they need, they note that *“many new leaders don’t know what they don’t know. So we might suggest another leader for them to shadow, or we might ask if they want us to come back in a couple weeks to help with strategic planning.”*

The review team leaves it up to the principal to decide how to give feedback to teachers. *“We ask the principal if he wants us to give feedback directly to teachers. This can be tricky in new schools because we don’t know what the issues are with staff.”* About three to four days later, the review team gives the school a brief written report that summarizes the feedback discussion. *“New leaders are already so busy that they don’t have time to read a ten-page report.”*

*We try not to give them a laundry list of things to improve. We say ‘here are two to three things that we’d like you to focus on that will give you the biggest bang for your buck.’*

- KIPP

## Tier 2: Formal Inspection

In a school’s second year, KIPP conducts more formal evaluations. It contracts with Cambridge Education LLC (CE) to conduct these evaluations. A few weeks before the formal inspection, a team from KIPP conducts an operational review to help the formal inspection team develop hypotheses about what they should focus on. *“The operations report helps inform our inspection and helps us develop a more overarching report. We ask, ‘Are the places you are putting your money where you will get the most impact for teaching and learning?’”*

*One elementary school was having huge issues around communication. The visiting team picked up on this within first hour at the school. They voiced this concern to the staff, and were able to help the principal move this issue forward. We were able to communicate with staff in a way that the principal wasn’t able to do.*

- KIPP

The formal review is very intensive, and the review team spends almost an entire week at the school, conducting about 80–100 hours of observation in total and speaking with parents, school leadership, teachers, board members, and students. The review team consists of two people from CE, one veteran school leader from another school, and one person from Jeff’s team.

This review has evolved from being completely evaluative to focusing on continuous improvement. The review team looks closely at the criteria aligned with KIPP’s operating principles, which are known as the Five Pillars and include metrics such as students’ readiness for college and the overall excellence of the

school.<sup>5</sup> They try to gather specific data points and use that evidence to rate schools on each criterion, on a range from “*very poor*” to “*excellent*.” Schools rarely receive a rating on either extreme. The team only occasionally gives an “*excellent*” rating because it holds very high expectations of excellence, and it rarely gives a “*very poor*” rating because struggling schools are identified early on to undergo a separate evaluation process.

The review team always tries to leave the school with specific information on areas of strength and areas for growth. The final report includes information from both the operations report and the on-site review and is designed to lead to improvements. “*The report can be used to trigger additional support measures or interventions if things aren’t going well. We can identify what supports the foundation needs to provide to that school and what the school needs to focus on itself.*”

### Tier 3: Fifth-Year Inspection

When three KIPP schools reached their five-year anniversary in 2005, KIPP conducted reviews that were identical to the second-year process, with a focus on operations, instruction, culture and alignment with the KIPP model. However, this review protocol did not adequately meet the needs of mature schools. Staff realized they needed to help leaders think about sustainability.

#### Sample questions asked

- Are test scores good? If so, why? Is the reason systems-dependent or people-dependent? How do you know?
- Do you have a long term financial plan? Do you need facilities? If so, is the board aware of this?

Thus, in 2006 KIPP worked with Cambridge Education to develop and implement a third type of inspection geared towards helping leaders think about long-term planning. This two-day review is conducted by one person from CE, one person from Jeff’s team, and one peer school leader who is from the same cohort as the leader being evaluated.

*We recently listened to a team interview the principal, who had a huge, unwieldy strategic plan. One of the things the principal thought they were doing well was literacy. But I saw they’re only teaching writing to one grade level and probed the principal about the logic behind this.*

- KIPP

Before the review, the team looks at test data for the past four years, as well as financial and operational data, student attendance and retention data and strategic planning documents.

The review consists of many ongoing conversations with the leader about what he needs, and discussions focus on things related to expansion, sustainability, and succession planning. According to one staff member, “*The bar is higher with these third tier visits. We push harder if we don’t see important pieces in place.*”

### Cost

The KIPP reviews are expensive. Consulting fees and travel comprise the majority of the costs. A first year visit is the least expensive because no consultants are used, costing about \$3,000, primarily to cover travel. The second-year review costs about \$20,000, but KIPP is working to lower those costs by reducing travel expenses, using CE staff located in the U.S., and using more of its own staff. The fifth year visits cost about \$10,000 in total, including \$7,000 in consulting fees. No cost information is available on The Center reviews.

<sup>5</sup> KIPP’s Five Pillars are: 1) High Expectations, 2) Choice & Commitment, 3) More Time, 4) Power to Lead, and 5) Focus on Results. See <http://www.kipp.org/01/fivepillars.cfm>

## COMPARING THE MODELS

	KIPP	The Center
<b>Getting Buy-in</b>	Schools must participate, reviewers still work with leaders to gain buy-in	Conversations with school leaders – schools must opt in to voluntarily participate
<b>Elements Observed</b>	Instruction, operations, financial sustainability, alignment with CMO model, and school culture	Culture, Leadership, Teaching & Assessment <i>(plans to look at operations and governance in the future)</i>
<b>Length</b>	2-5 days	½ day
<b>Frequency</b>	3 reviews: first year, second year, fifth year	2-3 reviews per year
<b>Who Conducts</b>	3-4 people: 1 school leader, 1 KIPP staff, and depending on review, 1-2 CE consultants	6-8 people: Center staff and school staff

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Build a credible team.**
  - **Use practitioners.** Having practitioners conduct the reviews builds credibility. Every KIPP and Center reviewer has worked in schools. According to KIPP, “*Everyone on the review team is a practitioner and that is VERY important because they know what they’re looking for and they are credible.*”
  - **Use third-party evaluators.** This ensures findings are unbiased. The Center is a third party, and KIPP brings in external consultants for its intensive second- and third-tier reviews. According to KIPP, “*Bringing in an external set of eyes is critical. We have two people from Cambridge Education and because they are external and their model been tested throughout the world, this system has credibility with school leaders.*”
- **Use a coaching model.** Schools want a model that allows them to reflect on their progress and will be more open to a review that is framed as developmental rather than evaluative. Use the review as a forum to provide feedback.
  - “*Inspections used to be really frightening: ‘the men in grey suits are coming’ – people thought they were going to get fired. We’ve changed the process to be less evaluative and more developmental. We look at it as coaching. We provide feedback and help school leaders reflect process.*” –KIPP
  - “*We realized that schools wanted a model that allowed them to reflect on their own process, so we developed a coaching model.*” – The Center
  - “*My staff feels like this is an evaluation that we do for our own benefit. No one else needs to look at it, and I think that makes teachers more open to the process.*” – Principal, NYC
- **Involve school leadership in a collaborative process.** Involve the school’s leadership team before, during and after the review so they buy in to the process and act on recommendations.
  - “*The school leader must be brought in for this process to be effective. We ask members of the school’s leadership team to participate in the review so they feel a part of the process. By working with the school leader upfront to customize our existing tools, the school can really be a part of developing what the process should look like.*” – The Center

- **Reviews for individual charter schools work best when initiated by a school leader.** This must be a voluntary process and schools must be willing to change.
  - *“We’ve had times when a board member has asked us to come in, sees an unfavorable report and then fires the principal. Or, a board member coaches teachers on what to say, and this lack of honesty is a complete waste of time.”*  
– The Center
  - *“When the review is asked for by a school leader it’s powerful and change happens.”* – The Center
- **Establish a baseline review against which to measure progress.** KIPP conducts a review when a school first opens. The Center conducts a baseline review which serves as the benchmark to measure progress.
- **Focus on a few priorities.** Don’t overwhelm schools with a laundry list of areas for improvement. Both KIPP and The Center identify three to four areas of focus for a given school.
- **Use clearly defined rubrics and measurable data.** This evidence will bring credibility to your recommendations and will help ensure buy-in from school staff.
  - *“The information is useful, very data-driven. For instance, by counting the number of times students makes eye contact, I can judge the level of student engagement.”* – Principal
  - *“It is important that you gather specific examples to give to a teacher.”* – KIPP
  - *“When deciding what to evaluate, clearly define priorities.”* – The Center
- **Take advantage of the in-person debrief.** School leaders are busy and don’t have time to read long, unwieldy reports. Both The Center and KIPP use the end of review debrief to work with the school leader to develop priority areas for improvement, and both try to keep the final written reports under ten pages. In following up, KIPP has found *“face-time to be the most effective.”*
- **Take the time to develop tools appropriate for your review.** As KIPP advises, *“Any organization going into this should not rush. Doing the groundwork upfront and developing the tools is extremely important.”*

## ONGOING CHALLENGES

- **There are few providers of these services, and those that exist are expensive.** Both The Center and KIPP have relied on services from SchoolWorks and Cambridge Education LLC to develop their tools and conduct the reviews. However, these services are expensive, and it is not clear how many other options are available.
- **Reviews are complicated, requiring lots of planning and resources.** Each organization devotes a substantial amount of time to planning and conducting the reviews, and still struggles with how to allocate enough resources to ensure adequate follow-up and support. The organization conducting the review does as much preparation as possible so as to minimize the preparation work and disruption at the school level.

- **Short reviews have limitations, but longer reviews are hard to implement.**
  - *“In one to two days, how deep can you really get? This year we asked them to come back for a two day review because we didn’t think a half-day snapshot was enough.”* – Principals
  - *“New schools are really hungry for feedback and often want more time.”* – KIPP
  - *“Intensive, multi-site process only really works when you have a lot of credibility with the schools.”* – Matt Candler
- **Providing adequate follow-up.** Both organizations are still struggling with how to provide the best post-review follow-up to schools.
  - *“After a week visit, the leader’s head is spinning. We would love to go back and help the leader implement changes. This is a huge gap.”* – KIPP

## APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED: NEW SCHOOLS FOR NEW ORLEANS

New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) was created in March 2006 to *“provide public schools, with an emphasis on charter schools, with the support they need in order to succeed in the new world of New Orleans public education.”*<sup>6</sup> Matt Candler, CEO of NSNO, applied the lessons he learned from his time at KIPP and The Center to help develop a school review process to use in New Orleans. Using practices developed by those organizations, NSNO is implementing a review process to help charter schools evaluate and improve their operations, instruction, and governance. Paid for by NSNO, these reviews are not as intense as KIPP or The Center’s reviews and include a half-day of reviews followed by the development of an action plan for improvement. This action plan may be accompanied by funding to help schools implement suggested changes.

Ultimately, NSNO plans to conduct four types of reviews:

- **Operational review.** These would be half-day visits and would likely occur every two to three years. Reviewers would ask to see policies and rate schools against a checklist of certain internal controls that the CMO or authorizer will be looking for in their review. NSNO hopes to align this process with authorizer renewal and *“expects that more schools will undertake school evaluations as they are getting closer to renewal.”* NSNO hopes to begin these reviews in 2007.
- **Instructional review.** These half-day visits would focus on alignment with the school’s instructional model rather than student achievement data or specific pedagogy. Reviewers would meet with the instructional leader to ask, *“What should we be seeing in a classroom?”* Then, they would determine whether what they observe is consistent with the school leader’s expectations. The reviewers would all be educators. NSNO estimates that this visit will cost about \$500-\$1,500. Matt Candler notes, *“Instructional reviews will require more trust than the operational assessment. We’ll have to be sensitive to the philosophy of instruction and tweak the process based on this.”* NSNO hopes to begin these reviews in 2008.

---

<sup>6</sup> New Schools for New Orleans Business Plan

- **Legal review.** NSNO staff will evaluate a school's documents (e.g. handbooks, employee contracts, hiring procedures) against a matrix to see if they meet certain legal requirements. NSNO plans to begin these reviews in the summer of 2007.
- **Governance review.** These reviews would involve evaluating board compositions to ensure they have representative skill sets, high-quality meeting procedures, and appropriate subcommittees with specific action plans. NSNO hopes to begin these evaluations in the fall of 2007.

*Establishing these relationships works best with schools that have not yet opened. Once a relationship is established, it's easier to maintain.*

- Matt Candler, NSNO

All reviews would be aimed to help schools identify one or two discrete areas for improvement and also to share best practices. The reviews will target weak and mid-performing schools, and will not focus on high-performing schools. NSNO staff notes that it might be more difficult to get schools to participate in instructional reviews than the operational and legal reviews because *“instructional reviews require a lot more trust-building than operational reviews.”* For these, NSNO hopes to entice schools to participate with the lure of funding available to help schools implement changes, but will not *“invest in schools that aren't invested in their own destiny.”*

## CONCLUSION

As evidenced by KIPP and The Center, conducting school reviews is a good way to gather data-based information on how a school is performing on multiple operational and instructional levels and help schools identify and address areas for improvement. While KIPP and The Center have had great success diagnosing areas of school strengths and weaknesses, each organization is still trying to figure out the best way to provide support and follow-through to its respective schools to ensure that recommendations are implemented.

Furthermore, in the scope of the research for this case study, there was not enough evidence to conclude that the practice of conducting school reviews leads to student achievement gains. Additional research is necessary to confirm the link between this promising practice and academic improvement.

**SCHOOL REVIEW TOOLKIT**  
**(THE NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE)**

---

**Toolkit Contents**

- **Level 1 Teaching & Assessment Rubric (The Center Document)**
- **Level 1 Leadership Rubric (The Center Document)**
- **Sample Schedule/Agenda (The Center Document)**
- **Sample Interview Questions (FSG Synthesized from The Center Document)**

**Additional Documents (Available Separately)**

- **Sample Observation Tools (The Center Document)**  
<http://www.newschools.org/files/NSNORevs-A.pdf>
- **Sample Completed Rubrics (The Center Document)**  
<http://www.newschools.org/files/NSNORevs-B.pdf>
- **Sample Full Report (The Center Document)**  
<http://www.newschools.org/files/NSNORevs-C.pdf>

Level 1 Teaching & Assessment Rubric

Rated on scale of 0-2

<School Name>

<Date>

Level 1 Teaching and Assessment

2

1

0

<b>Clear objectives</b>	<u>Across the Board</u> , teachers' learning objectives are clear to students and observers, purposeful, evident, and returned to.	<u>In Many</u> classrooms, teachers' learning objectives are clear, purposeful, evident, and returned to.	<u>In FEW</u> or <u>NO</u> classrooms are teachers' learning objectives clear, purposeful, evident, or returned to.
<b>Time-on-task</b>	Educational time in the classroom is <u>completely</u> maximized with at least 70% of time spent on instruction.	Educational time in the classroom is <u>generally</u> maximized with <u>LITTLE</u> time wasted.	Educational time in the classroom is <u>not</u> maximized with <u>much</u> time wasted.
<b>Data Driven Intervention</b>	Instruction includes re-teaching that is driven by student performance data.	Instruction includes re-teaching that is driven by teacher instinct and student input.	Instruction does not include re-teaching of material.
<b>Level of Engagement</b>	75% of the time or better, students are engaged and challenged at their appropriate developmental levels.	60 - 74% of the time, students are engaged and challenged at their appropriate developmental levels.	Less than 60% of the time, students are engaged and challenged at their appropriate developmental levels.
<b>Informal Assessment</b>	Teachers <u>consistently</u> assess student understanding in the course of their lessons in order to inform next steps in instruction.	Teachers <u>often</u> assess student understanding in the course of their lessons in order to inform next steps in instruction.	Teachers <u>rarely</u> assess student understanding in the course of their lessons in order to inform next steps in instruction.
<b>Consistency</b>	Set/stated consequences/rewards are followed through and consistent among all kids in ALL classes.	Set/stated consequences/rewards are followed through and consistent among MOST kids in classes.	Set/stated consequences/rewards are NOT followed through and consistent among kids in classes.
<b>High Academic Expectations</b>	Teachers <u>universally</u> hold all students in their class to high academic expectations.	Teachers <u>often</u> hold all students in their class to high academic expectations.	Teachers <u>rarely</u> hold all students in their class to high academic expectations.
<b>Classroom Environment</b>	Classrooms meet all 3 of the Bronx Arts classroom expectations for general space, furniture, and wall use.	Classrooms meet 2/3 of the Bronx Arts classroom expectations for general space, furniture, and wall use.	Classrooms meet 1/3 of the Bronx Arts classroom expectations for general space, furniture, and wall use.

Level 1 School Leadership Rubric

Rated on scale of 0-2

<School name> |

<Date of review>

Level 1 School Leadership

	2	1	0
<b>Curricular Planning</b>	All teachers have/ understand the year-end goals for their students, and are planning and adjusting accordingly to get there.	Roughly 60% of teachers are planning and adjusting to get to year-end goals, OR all teachers understand their year-end goals but are not adjusting accordingly.	Less than 50% teachers are planning or adjusting for year-end goals.
<b>Curriculum Alignment</b>	Curriculum is <u>fully</u> aligned with state standards, and all teachers know and understand this.	Curriculum is <u>partially</u> aligned with state standards, OR only some teachers know and understand the full alignment.	Curriculum is <u>in the process of being</u> aligned with state standards, OR teachers have a vague understanding of partial/full alignment.
<b>Structure to Support Learning</b>	The school's schedule includes: * sufficient time for core subjects * uninterrupted learning blocks * timing of subjects based on student needs (and/or research)	The school's schedule includes two of the three elements named at left.	The school's schedule includes 1 or none of the elements named at left.
<b>Teacher Collaboration</b>	Teachers have 2+ hours each week of in which they collaborate on planning and discuss practice. More than half of teachers take advantage of this.	Teachers have more than an hour each week for collaboration and planning, but it lacks buy-in from more than half of teachers.	Teachers have an hour or less each week for collaboration and planning, OR there is no teacher buy-in for use of the time.
<b>Measurement of Teacher Effectiveness</b>	Teacher effectiveness is measured at least five times a year using a consistent objective criteria, and teachers have a clear understanding of the ways in which they will be measured.	Teacher effectiveness is measured several times a year, BUT the consistent criteria is not fully-developed OR teachers have only a vague sense of the ways in which they will be measured.	Teacher effectiveness is measured, BUT there is not a consistent criteria AND teachers only vaguely understand how they will be assessed.
<b>Staff support</b>	Staff members whose practice is in need of improvement are receiving observations, feedback, and coaching to improve instruction. Non-struggling staff members are acknowledged and applauded.	Staff members whose practice is in need of improvement are receiving some mix of observations, feedback, and coaching to improve instruction. Non-struggling staff are not being assessed.	Staff whose practice is in need of improvement are not recognized, or do not receive extra attention and support.
<b>Classroom Observations</b>	Combined, the Instructional Team allocates an average of 30% of time to being in classrooms & giving feedback.	Combined, Instructional Team allocates 15-29% of time to being in classrooms & giving feedback, OR 30% of time is allocated but feedback is not being given.	Combined, Instructional Team allocates less than 15% of time or less to being in classrooms and giving feedback, OR 15-29% of time is allocated but feedback is not being given.
<b>Data-driven instructional program</b>	There is a school-wide process to guide teachers in using data for determining what needs re-teaching.	There is a school-wide process <i>in development</i> to guide teachers in using data for determining what needs re-teaching.	There are plans to create a school-wide process to guide teachers in using data for determining what needs re-teaching.

# NEW YORK CITY CENTER FOR CHARTER SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

## Sample Agenda/Schedule

<School Name>

<Date>

				AGENDA							
Time	Item	Room(s)	<School> Staff Involvement								
8:00 – 8:15	<b>Center Team Arrival</b>										
8:15 – 8:30	<b>Tool Review</b>	Center team reviews how to use tools with Bronx Arts team	All leadership team members who will be conducting observations								
8:30 – 11:00 (2 hr 30 min)	<b>Classroom Observations</b>	Varies (see below)									
	<i>Review Team Pairs</i>										
	<School name>		Center								
	A	B									
1	<>	<>	Jessica								
2	<>	<>	Glenn								
3	<>	<>	Cate								
4	<>	<>	Chris								
				8:30–8:50	8:50–9:10	9:15–9:40	9:45–10:10	10:10-10:35	10:35-11:00		
				<b>School Staff A</b>			<b>School Staff B</b>				
<b>K Red</b>	Pair 1						Pair 3				
<b>K Blue</b>						Pair 2				Pair 4	
<b>1 Red</b>		Pair 1								Pair 2	
<b>1 Blue</b>							Pair 4				
<b>2 Red</b>	Pair 2							Pair 3			
<b>2 Blue</b>						Pair 1					
<b>3 Red</b>		Pair 4								Pair 3	
<b>3 Blue</b>							Pair 2				
<b>4 Red</b>	Pair 3							Pair 4			
<b>4 Blue</b>							Pair 1				
<b>5 Red</b>		Pair 2				Pair 4					
<b>5 Blue</b>						Pair 3				Pair 1	
<b>6 Red</b>	Pair 4					X	X	Pair 2			
<b>6 Blue</b>		Pair 3				X	X	Pair 1			
11:00 – 11:45 (45 min)	<b>Leaders Interviews</b>	<Leaders> space	All directors								
11:45 – 12:30 (45 min)	<b>Teacher Interviews</b> Center Staff supplies lunch	Teacher interviews – (Cate & Glenn) - <Leaders space>	Teachers from 1, 2, 5, and Dance								
12:30 – 12:45 (15 minutes)	<b>Rubricize</b> Fill out rubrics reflecting findings	Wherever able <i>on your own</i>	<School> Staff complete by 12:45 (any time during the day, e.g. while Center staff interviews teachers)								
12:45 – 1:45 (1 hour)	<b>Debrief</b>	TBD	<School> Leadership Team								

## **Sample Interview Questions – For Teachers and Leaders**

School leaders are interviewed during the first 45 minutes of the day. School teachers are asked the same questions during lunch.

### **School Culture: Level 1**

- (For leaders) What are your non-negotiables for expected behavior?
- (For teachers) Do your non-negotiables differ from those of your fellow teachers?
- How are your and the school's expectations communicated to parents and families?
- Are students learning from their poor decisions? How do you know?
- What is the grading and promotion criteria and how it is implemented? How is this criteria communicated to the students and families?
- On a scale of 1-10, ten being maximum capacity, how hard are students working academically here? How hard to you want them or do you expect them to work?
- Ob a scale of 1-10, ten being maximum capacity, how hard are teachers working here?
- On a scale of 1-10, ten being maximum capacity, how hard are leaders working here? How are they monitoring their work and progress?

### **School Leadership: Level 1**

- Curriculum: Is your curriculum fully aligned with the state standards? How do you know?
- Teacher Effectiveness:
  - o (For leaders) How is it measured? What type of scale? How often is it measured?
  - o (For teachers) How is teacher effectiveness measured here?
- Staff member weaknesses
  - o (For leaders) Are the weaker staff members identified? Are they supported? How are stronger faculty supported professionally?
  - o (For teachers) How do you know if you are doing well or not in the eyes of your school leaders?
- Observations: How often are leaders in classrooms observing? Do they offer feedback? What form does that feedback take?
- Structure of day: Does the structure and schedule of the day support the achievement goals? Are there any better ways to structure the academic day?
- Data driven intervention: How do teachers figure out what needs re-teaching? How have your school leaders helped you create/refine the process?

### **Teaching and Assessment: Level 1**

- How do teachers know when to asses student performance levels How often is assessment occurring?

**Curricular Planning: What should students know by the end of the school year? How are you planning on reaching that goal?**