



GRADUATING CLASS EXCELS AT THE SISULU-WALKER CHARTER SCHOOL OF HARLEM, NEW YORK STATE'S FIRST CHARTER SCHOOL

- *Current 5th grade graduates were the first kindergarteners of the first charter school to open its doors in New York State*
- *Reading scores are 1.7x higher than nearby traditional public schools on City tests*
- *Math scores are 2.3x higher than nearby traditional public schools*
- *Sisulu-Walker is now the highest scoring charter school in New York City*



NEW YORK, JUNE 28, 2005 - Six years ago, in September 1999, Gail Whiteman enrolled her daughter, Tori, into the first kindergarten class of the first public charter school to open its doors in New York State, The Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem. In a neighborhood where traditional public schools had been failing for generations, Ms. Whiteman's hope was that Tori would receive a tuition free, public school education rivaling the finest schools in New York City. At last week's Sisulu-Walker graduation ceremony, Ms. Whiteman saw her dreams come true, as she and the families of 72 other Sisulu-Walker 5th grade students celebrated their children's achievement as the top-performing 5th grade public charter school class in New York City.



“This school has been a blessing to my family and to many families in our community,” said Ms. Whiteman, whose daughter, along with many of the school’s graduates, will attend one of New York’s premier middle schools in the fall. “Sisulu-Walker has provided a challenging and nurturing environment in which our children have thrived.”

A total of 90.4% of Sisulu-Walker fifth graders scored in the highest two levels on the New York City ELA (reading) test this year. Sisulu-Walker’s score was 1.7x higher than the 51.9% score for traditional public schools in Harlem District 5 where most of Sisulu-Walker’s students live. It was 1.4x higher than the 63.7% score for New York City public schools as a whole.

A total of 76.7% of Sisulu-Walker fifth graders scored in the highest two levels on the City math test. Their score was 2.3x higher than the 33.5% score for traditional public schools in District 5, and almost 1.7x higher than the 46.1% score for New York City public schools overall.

Sisulu-Walker’s fifth grade reading and math scores were also the highest for any public charter school in New York City. As a charter school, Sisulu-Walker admits its students through an open lottery process. Dr. Norma Figueroa-Hurwitz has served as Sisulu-Walker’s principal since 2003, and the fifth graders’ primary instructors have been Michelle Haynes and Leslie Fuller-Hope (who joined the school in 1999 and 2000, respectively) and teaching assistant Olympia Haynes (who joined the school in 2001).

“How exciting it is to witness the graduation of the 2005 class of Sisulu-Walker 5th graders!” said Ms. Minnie Goka, a founding member of the Sisulu-Walker Board of Trustees. “Their high academic performance coupled with their joyful and determined spirits make a clear statement about the promise of charter schools. Today we celebrate the hard work of these students and their parents, and recognize the commitment and dedication of their teachers.”

Sisulu-Walker is a public charter school enrolling approximately 225 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. The school is named for two great human rights leaders, Walter Sisulu and Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, and their wives. Walter Sisulu, former Secretary General of the African National Congress, worked closely with Nelson Mandela and was at the forefront of the struggle against South African apartheid for over five decades. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, a renowned pastor, author, lecturer and advocate for human rights, served as the Chief of Staff to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during critically important years of the American civil rights movement.

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“The achievement of Sisulu-Walker is a true testament to the commitment of many caring individuals,” said Steven B. Klinsky, a founder of Sisulu-Walker and also of Victory Schools, which has served as Sisulu-Walker’s education management organization for the last six years. “I’d like to particularly thank Principal Norma Figueroa-Hurwitz, the school’s dedicated board of trustees and the outstanding faculty and staff of the school, who, along with Sisulu-Walker’s children and their families, are the true heroes of this achievement.”