

## **Sisulu Children’s Academy Recommended for Charter Renewal in All Grades**

NEW YORK, January 23, 2004 – The staff of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York has recommended an extension of the charter for Sisulu Children’s Academy at all grade levels. Sisulu is the only charter school in New York State to be recommended for renewal at all grades.

In making its recommendation for extension, the Institute staff pointed out strong upward trends and positive indicators at the school in many areas, including (with quotations in **bold**):

- **“Sisulu posted notable and consistent progress on New York City’s third grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments. In English Language Arts... [Sisulu’s] passing rate exceeded both that of Community School District 5 and that of “similar schools”... chosen for comparison purposes.”** Sisulu’s passing rate was fifteen percentage points higher than the level for the District, eight points higher than the level at one “similar school” and twenty-nine points higher than the level at the second “similar school”. The Sisulu third graders tested in 2003 included those students who began at the school as kindergarteners in the school’s first year. Sisulu’s math scores on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade CTBS test also improved, with a ten point increase in the number of children passing.
- **“Sisulu made significant strides in meeting an absolute measure of increasing the percentage of children passing the New York State 4<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts and mathematics assessments.”** The Institute cited **“academic gains in the early years of [Sisulu’s] charter”**, flagging performance in the third year, and renewed strength in Sisulu’s fourth and fifth years. The Institute found, **“in the later years of its charter, Sisulu posted academic gains that show it can, with continuing instructional leadership and strong focus on English Language Arts and mathematics, fulfill its mission.”** In English Language Arts, Sisulu improved performance by 10% in its fourth

year, and in math improved its performance by 37%. Sisulu's gains on the State math exam outpaced both local District 5 and one of the two "similar schools".

- **“The level, volume and rigor of student written work available at the school supports the Institute’s determination that the school now has a fully functioning and operational level of curriculum and instruction... The curriculum proposed for the term of a future charter contains an appropriate level of rigor and depth to enable students to succeed.”** In addition, the Institute found:
  - **“Sisulu has successfully implemented thematic units that are linked to State performance standards and are based on E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Curriculum.”**
  - **“Sisulu now provides an academically focused after school program three days a week and ... a Saturday academic enrichment program.”**
  - **“If well implemented, the English Language Arts curriculum, especially in the nexus created by the use of a challenging reading program, the Core Knowledge curriculum and a strong writing program, are likely to provide Sisulu’s students a strong foundation for success as measured by the New York State 4<sup>th</sup> grade assessment.”**
- **“The energetic principal and teaching staff have created an academically focused learning environment... The school currently has a principal who holds demonstrated success in building academic success in a New York City elementary school.”** The Institute praised Sisulu’s outstanding new principal, Ms. Norma Figueroa-Hurwitz, for her leadership in building a culture of instructional rigor and dedication.
  - **“[The principal] has instituted a staff and professional development structure that focuses unmistakably on maximizing instruction and ensuring**

**students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to excel academically.”**

- **“Teachers at the school are focused on meeting the learning needs of Sisulu’s children.”**
  - **“Sisulu’s current teaching staff clearly articulates the instructional challenges they face in the classroom and the strengths they are building in their commitment to professional development... Staff commitment is evident both in interviews about expectations for student success and in the amount of time and energy teachers devote to designing and executing lessons that are likely to lead to improved academic achievement for their children. Teachers display a real commitment to ensuring student academic success through their words and actions. Eager attendance at professional development sessions and constant analysis of maturing strengths in instructional practice is a hallmark of the school’s current teaching staff. Common curriculum plans link classroom lessons to State performance standards. Classrooms are generally orderly and reflect high expectations for student behavior and achievement.”**
  - The Institute added, **“The rigor and dedication to success the school staff displays in these efforts has resulted in volumes of student written work that demonstrates qualities demanded by New York State performance standards.”**
- **“The school’s board of trustees is providing strong leadership.”** The Institute found that Sisulu’s board of trustees was providing effective leadership and has articulated a unified and consistent commitment to the mission of the school. They praised the board’s exemplary focus on increasing student achievement, its support of the new instructional leader, and its work to strengthen the school’s curriculum and fiscal position.

- **“Overall, there is strong evidence of student and parent satisfaction.”** The Institute found that parents and students believe Sisulu compares favorably to other public schools and rate strongly the school’s overall performance. Respondents cited the dedication of the school’s board, the educational opportunities, art, and the science programs as some of the reasons they chose Sisulu.
  - **“Each year of its charter, the school has maintained a waiting list of students hoping to enroll.”**
- **“The school has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner.”**
  - **“[Sisulu] has had successful audits for four straight fiscal years... In each of those years, the audit report contained the auditor’s unqualified opinion that the financial statements were in conformance with generally accepted accounting principals. The school has displayed an exemplary level of development in this area.”**

Overall, the Institute found that the school’s educational and financial plans were **“reasonable, feasible and achievable”**. The Institute has therefore recommended renewal at Sisulu for two out of a possible five years in order to establish that Sisulu’s positive trends will continue. The school fully expects that at the end of the two-year extension it will be clear that Sisulu is well on its way to achieving its mission.

### **About Sisulu Children's Academy—Harlem Public Charter School**

Sisulu is a K-5 school with approximately 300 students located in central Harlem. As New York State's first charter school, Sisulu receives local, state and national attention. In addition to Victory Schools, Sisulu is supported by a committed parent and teacher organization, board of trustees and community partners. Sisulu was opened in 1999 and is currently in the final year of its first five-year charter term.

### **About Victory Schools**

Victory Schools is a national leader in public/private school management partnerships. Victory's mission is to create great schools for America's children through partnerships with state departments of education, local boards of education, teachers, teachers unions, outstanding community groups and parents. The company is unique in its consultative approach to assisting public school districts; its strong emphasis on partnerships with all public education stakeholders; and its desire to provide the highest quality, most personalized service to the schools and districts we serve. Victory was founded in 1999 and is headquartered in New York City. The company currently provides services to 11 public schools serving approximately 5,700 children in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. The company is also a senior advisor to the Christina School District, the largest school district in Delaware. For further information, Victory can be contacted at (212) 786-7900 or on the web at [www.victoryschools.com](http://www.victoryschools.com).

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