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New Covenant charter renewed as students show exceptional academic gains and record high scores

Major school reforms efforts at school to continue for complete turnaround

ALBANY, January 16, 2009—The Charter Schools Committee of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York last week unanimously voted to renew New Covenant Charter School's charter. The Committee's action will ensure that exceptional student academic gains and reform efforts will continue at New Covenant Charter School.

In renewing the school's charter, the Committee recognized New Covenant's most recent academic results. Most notably:

- Like all New York State charter schools, New Covenant has to meet rigorous academic benchmarks in four subject areas: English language arts, math, science and social studies. On the most recent State exams:
 - 91% of New Covenant students scored proficient or better in science;
 - 86% of New Covenant students scored proficient or better in social studies; and
 - 73% of New Covenant students scored proficient or better in math
- In science, New Covenant now outscores many charter schools in Albany and the Albany School District 91% to 85%
- In social studies, New Covenant now outscores many charter schools in Albany and the Albany School District 86% to 73%
- In math, New Covenant now outscores many charter schools in Albany and the Albany School District 73% to 65%
- New Covenant outscores the Albany School District in math, social studies and science despite the fact that 93% of New Covenant's children are low income, compared to only 63% of children attending Albany School District schools
- In English language arts, New Covenant Charter School graduating sixth graders outscore the Albany School District sixth graders by 21%, and all other charter schools in Albany except KIPP at the sixth grade
- New Covenant's fifth graders virtually tied Albany School District fifth graders in English language arts on the latest State exam, and the percentage of New Covenant third and fourth graders passing the State English language arts test has risen more than 75% in the last two years
- New Covenant outscores two of three public elementary schools in its neighborhood on the State English language arts test, and overall the school is

- now a mere seven percentage points behind the Albany School District as a whole on the English language arts test
- Only one New Covenant graduating sixth grader scored in the bottom quartile on the most recent State English language arts exam, compared to over 31% of these same students two years ago, before Victory. No New Covenant fifth grader scored in the lowest quartile on the State English language arts exam, vs. over 45% of the same students before Victory
 - No New Covenant sixth grader scored in the lowest quartile on the State math test, vs. 31% two years ago, before Victory. Only one New Covenant fifth grader scored in the lowest quartile on the State math exam, vs. 24% of these same students before Victory
 - Overall, since 2006 New Covenant's academic scores are improving across the board at a rate that is faster than all other Albany public schools, including public charter schools

The school's current academic achievement is a strong indication of the remarkable progress that students at New Covenant Charter School have made since the school's board put Victory Schools in charge of the instructional program at the campus two years ago. Since then, the New Covenant school board and Victory Schools have overhauled the school's organizational structure, added many educational resources, and hired a new principal to oversee instruction and turn the school around.

"New Covenant is entrusted with the care and education of more than 600 students, and we have taken that responsibility very seriously. With progress and record high scores on the New York State exams, New Covenant's academic performance has improved in every subject area, every year since our arrival," said James Stovall, chief administrative officer of Victory Schools, the school's educational manager. "Despite some challenges a few years ago when the school was under different management, New Covenant is now in the midst of a remarkable turnaround, and we look forward to continued school-wide improvement."

New Covenant's academic gains have been accelerating — higher in the second year of Victory's management than in the first. New Covenant's gains are consistent with the performance of other top-performing Victory-supported schools statewide.

New Covenant's strong academic performance over the last three years has been achieved with teachers who are members of the New York State United Teachers union. In addition, although it is a public school New Covenant only receives approximately 80% of the public funding received by traditional public schools in the Albany School District.

Going forward, the structures that have enabled New Covenant's remarkable turnaround will remain in place. Both Victory Schools and the school's principal are committed to working with the New Covenant school board to ensure that the school's turnaround is complete.

In deciding to renew New Covenant's charter, the Charter Schools Committee of the State University of New York chose not to follow the recommendation of its staff, the Charter Schools Institute, which was under a strict policy to recommend either a full five-year charter renewal or no charter renewal at all. Given that New Covenant met its math, social studies and science benchmarks but did not fully meet its English language arts benchmark, the Institute was required to follow the strict policy in recommending non-renewal for New Covenant. However, the Charter Schools Committee chose not to apply this strict "all or nothing" policy to New Covenant, given the school's dramatic rise in student achievement the last several years.

Importantly, this is not the first time the Charter Schools Committee has rejected a recommendation from its staff. In 2007 the Institute recommended the closure of Ark Community Charter School in Troy, a school with a similar academic track record as New Covenant. The Charter Schools Committee rejected the recommendation and instead awarded the school one additional year of operation. Last week, the Charter Schools Committee extended Ark's charter for five additional years because the school continued to demonstrate strong academic progress over the last year. Similarly, the Charter Schools Committee voted to award New Covenant Charter School one additional year, given New Covenant's remarkable academic gains in student learning and achievement over the course of its last charter term.

About New Covenant Charter School

Since its establishment in 1999, New Covenant Charter School has been led by a board of Albany citizens. Until August 2006, New Covenant relied on the Edison Schools company for educational management support, and the school's results were below standard. The New Covenant school board acted by replacing Edison with new educational leadership led by Victory Schools and the school has seen a dramatic turnaround academically and operationally since that time.

About Victory Schools

Victory Schools is a national leader in public charter and district school management partnerships. Victory's mission is to create the finest public schools in America 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 provides service to 19 traditional public and public charter schools serving approximately 7,000 children in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago.