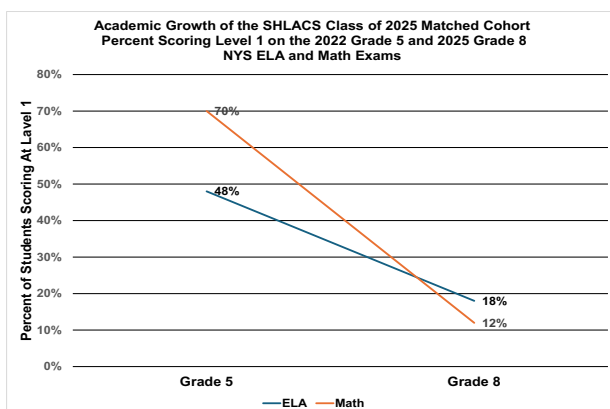
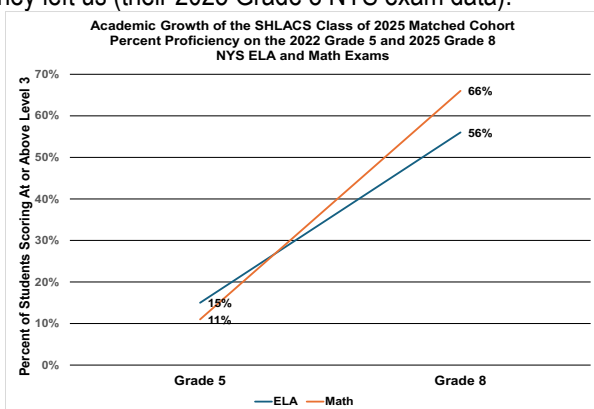


## Executive Summary

St HOPE Leadership Academy Charter School (SHLACS) began the first year of its current charter term in the Fall of 2021. If we remember back to that time, it was an unprecedented period when the world had essentially shut down for 18 months because of a global pandemic. NYC public schools were forced to shut down in March 2020; and for more than one full academic year, the vast majority of students and teachers had been engaged in what was an unfamiliar, and ultimately, less than ideal pedagogical model for K-12 students—asynchronous and synchronous remote learning. Recognizing the need to bring students back to school as quickly as possible to stem the decline in student academic and social-emotional growth that would inevitably result from distance learning, we were among the first schools to offer in-person learning during the 2020-21 school year. In December 2020, English language learners, whose learning was most compromised in a remote learning setting, were invited back into the school building to have more in-person instructional support. By February 2021, the school leadership team (SLT) opened the school for hybrid learning for any student whose family wanted them to return to in-person learning; 1/3 of the student body opted to come back and the remaining students continued to engage in the remote learning program.

When all students returned to in-person learning at the start of our current charter term, they had, as expected, lost significant ground academically due to both pandemic learning loss and their social-emotional regression. Our fall 2021 NWEA Reading and Math scores showed that our students were starting the school year significantly more behind grade level than in any year prior to the pandemic. Four academic years later, however, our students' performance on the 2025 NYS ELA and math exams clearly demonstrates that SHLACS has emerged successfully from the pandemic. The two graphs below provide unquestionable evidence that our instructional program is accelerating learning and turning the tide on pandemic learning loss. The graphs plot the academic growth of our Class of 2025 matched cohort from the time they entered our school as 6<sup>th</sup> graders (their baseline 2022 Grade 5 NYS ELA and math scores) to when they left us (their 2025 Grade 8 NYS exam data).



These students entered SHLACS with significant academic deficits, only 15% and 11% of them were proficient on their Grade 5 NYS ELA and math exams, respectively. Further, 70% of them scored a Level 1 on the Grade 5 math exam and 48% at Level 1 on the Grade 5 ELA exam. Three years later, 66% of these same students were proficient on the Grade 8 math exam and 56% on the ELA exam and the percentage of students scoring at the lowest Level 1 on the Grade 8 ELA and math exam plummeted to 18% and 12%, respectively. The academic growth that our instructional program is able to stimulate in our students after just three years is very compelling.

Where other schools overhauled curricular choices, brought in expensive outside tutoring programs, focused on test prep, etc., to address pandemic learning loss, SHLACS doubled-down on its tried-and-true highly individualized instructional framework. Our underlying instructional philosophy and approach honed over the four years prior to the pandemic clearly provided the necessary foundation on which our educators could address pandemic learning loss. This foundation embraced a student-centered approach to instruction that meaningfully engaged students in their own learning and built their metacognitive awareness and skills to take ownership of their own progress, growth, and achievement. Grounded in practices to increase student engagement and elevate and expand student achievement, this approach had supported significant student growth and achievement during our previous charter term. With students arriving with significantly more academic deficits post-pandemic, our leadership knew that the instructional approach that was needed to re-engage students and accelerate learning hadn't changed. Where SHLACS did make instructional enhancements and modifications, they aligned with, complemented and strengthened our instructional

foundation. One example of a strategic enhancement we implemented is the i-Ready math digital instructional platform which has contributed to our students' strong math performance this charter term; notably, for the first time on the 2025 NYS math assessments, our 8<sup>th</sup> graders outperformed their NYC peers by a significant margin. This adaptive platform has greatly accelerated our students' attainment of math concepts and skills, particularly for students who continue to arrive to us without basic numeracy skills.

Our students' academic performance also improved as we successfully rebuilt our strong pre-pandemic school culture. Remote learning and the absence of being able to interact in person with peers and adults in school robbed students of critical opportunities to develop the social emotional skills needed as a middle schooler. Students reverted to physical aggression instead of problem-solving strategies to resolve disagreements or real or imagined perceptions of disrespect. The level of high impact behaviors that students were engaging in in our first year back were beyond what we had experienced prior to the pandemic. Adding to this situation was the racial reckoning that had taken place after George Floyd's murder, which had a negative impact on the confidence and competencies of our teachers and staff in addressing and resolving student disciplinary issues through a restorative lens, a practice we had fully embraced and implemented with fidelity before the pandemic. The adults in the school community were hesitant to hold students accountable for their actions, unsure of what was appropriate in the highly sensitive environment in which everyone was operating. Our entire community had to relearn and re-integrate the tenets of restorative practice that have resulted in our school culture and climate not just returning to where it was pre-pandemic but moving forward towards our goal to make it more student-centered, student-facilitated, and student-led.

The post-pandemic contraction of enrollment in the NYC public school system brought us another challenge. For the first time we have fallen below the allowable floor of 85% of maximum enrollment. We are not alone, though, as district and charter schools are seeing their enrollments shrink. In fact, there have been a significant number of charter schools, both single independent charter schools like SHLACS to schools within large networks like Success Academy, which have sought and were approved for charter revisions to reduce their post-pandemic charter enrollment. As a small charter school, we are hit financially by enrollment challenges which reduce our per pupil revenue, and we have had to make hard budgetary decisions to ensure that we can still provide our students with the comprehensive instructional program and social emotional supports they need to succeed while remaining financially stable and sustainable. We have been able to do so because of the strong financial oversight of our Board of Trustees (BOT) and finance committee and the smart, strategic and prudent financial and resource (including human resource) management of our leadership team. But because we do not see a large influx of families back into the city in the near future, in order to be compliant with enrollment, we have made the decision to seek a revision request with this renewal application to reduce our maximum approved enrollment from 300 students to 210 students. Our BOT and SLT arrived at this number after careful planning, deliberations and financial analysis. It is an enrollment level, where even if we fall to 85% of maximum enrollment, it allows us to operate our instructional program with fidelity. We are an important institution for students who have struggled academically and personally within their former school settings, including middle schools they previously attended before finding us. We are committed to continuing to be a school where all children feel they belong and where they can succeed. We have one non-material revision request to modify our 8<sup>th</sup> grade science program replacing Regents Earth Science with Regents Living Environment.

The BOT and SLT remain committed to our overarching goal of perfecting and sustaining a high-performing middle school in central Harlem that serves the at-risk students in the community. A stand-alone middle school in one of the NYC's poorest neighborhoods that is truly a beacon of excellence is arguably one of the field's biggest challenges, but we are dedicated to achieving this mission. We firmly believe that the backbone of democracy is a strong public education system—this has never been more of an imperative than now, as we find ourselves as a nation at a crucial crossroad. We are proud of the work we have done to overcome post-pandemic challenges. Our entire community looks forward to the opportunity to have a new five-year charter term to build upon this work so that more children can become true embodiments of our mission:

*At St. HOPE Leadership Academy, we are committed to educating self-motivated, productive, and critically thinking leaders who are prepared to succeed in a college preparatory high school, committed to serving others, and passionate about lifelong learning. As such, we regularly reflect on our behavior, attitudes, work habits, and performance to track our progress and keep them aligned with our mission*