Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen and thank you for participating in the final phase of the Hunter College Campus Schools Validation Team Visit. This has been a wonderful visit and we thank you for making us feel so welcomed. To serve as a member of a Middle States Validation Team is one of the most professionally and personally rewarding experience one can have. We are grateful to each of you for giving us the opportunity to participle in your school’s efforts to improve.

We know of your eagerness to hear of our findings, our impressions of your school and the service you provide to your students. First, let me take a moment to tell you about our final responsibilities as your Validation Team. This afternoon, prior to this meeting, I met for a brief period with Mr. Collins so that I could inform him of our preliminary findings. It was merely a summary of what will be included in a detailed written report. Until that report is finalized and sent to the school at a later date, there is also this presentation of the Oral Report to the school to review the same core information.

Immediately at the conclusion of this Oral Report, the Validation Team and I will leave the school and will take no questions. This should not be construed as an indicator of negative or unfavorable findings, but is in fact standard Middle States procedure at the conclusion of a Validation Team Visit.

As I searched to find the best words to tell you of the significance of the challenge you have begun, I needed to look no further than Middle States own guide to schools who choose to undergo an accreditation protocol. In that guide, we read that this process is about creating a vision of a preferred future, notably through strategic planning and leadership that reaches out to the whole of the community.

Dr. William Cook, a leader in the design and facilitation of strategic planning, reminds us that such planning is not a management exercise or a science, but a leadership activity based on relationships that reach out beyond chain of command and traditional roles. We all know that good managers do things right; but leaders do the right thing. In choosing Excellence By Design, Hunter has shown that it has a cadre of leaders who understand much about what the right thing is. On behalf of your Validation Team, I congratulate you on your choices.

During the Oral Report, it is tempting to single out those deserving of special recognition. This is always a very difficult thing to do, not because there is no one deserving of this recognition, but because there are so many who could be chosen. In naming one or a few, we risk minimizing the contribution of so many others. We would do no such thing and praise all of you for this impressive effort. Indeed, no organization can create that vision of its preferred future on the work of a single person or a small group. Only through community and broad-based ownership of the plan and goals can Hunter truly succeed.

Still, we feel compelled to express our admiration for the claim and reassuring leadership of Randy Collins and reflect on how many times we heard all staff, parents and students praise and show respect for the administration at both schools. Your teachers and students clearly respect and appreciate each of you and there can be no higher praise for a leadership team.
We would be remiss if we did not personally thank our guides for all of their assistance to us, especially to Audrey for teaching us the words to the Sarah Maria Jones song, and last, but hardly least, we all really loved Elsa.

As you know, the *Excellence by Design* protocol requires that the school engage in rigorous self study in twelve standards of performance in order to identify critical objectives to be obtained over the course of the next few years. The Validation Team has taken careful note of the self-study and evaluated these objectives. We have reviewed and visited your educational programs, your facilities and resources, the governing structure and its policies, and the leadership and organization of the school. We have spoken with school and college leaders, building and program administrators, teachers, students and parents. In so doing, we are left with a very good impression.

Our job was a two-fold one. First, we are identified as a Validation Team because we are here to validate you for your choice to pursue growth, create a vision of your own preferred future, and for the fine work you have done as you strike out in your pursuit of excellence.

Second, we are here to suggest ways that you can still better achieve your goals, and perhaps, to suggest one or two that you have yet to fully consider.

Again, detail will be found in the written report. Today we want to share things more globally. We begin by highlighting what we perceived to be the assets of the Campus Schools, some of which we think are unique to Hunter:

1. The remarkable abilities and overwhelming enthusiasm of the student body for the School

   We would all agree that one of the high points of our visit was our opportunity to observe and speak with students. I am not sure if “WOW!” quite covers it. There appears to be no student who does not want to be here, who did not choose to be here. There appears to be no student who does not drive herself or himself to achieve distinction. Their abundant energy cannot be explained by youth alone. It is no doubt part of the gifted formula.

   Beginning with such a promising crop of students is an advantage to you that is shared by only a small group of educators. Just as we would envy the youngsters their futures, other teachers would envy their colleagues at Hunter the opportunity to work with avid and committed learners who challenge you to be the best teachers and administrators you can be.

2. The leadership of the school

   We have been made aware that continuity in key positions has been variable over these many years. Your most veteran teachers have seen 10 principals come and go; almost every staff member with whom we spoke made mention of this issue. The explanations for the pattern vary, but seem to gather around two issues: the enormous workload and responsibility and the degree to which personalities and visions of school leadership has- or has not- been compatible with the of the College leadership.

   Clearly stability of leadership has been a significant concern and has had repercussions that have impacted everything from staff morale, structure of the programs, development of processes and
protocols to guide the school’s important functions, and the ever-crucial relationship to the College. These are not small matters and you will hear more from us about them in the report.

But while eager for stability in these critical positions, staff are equally concerned that the right people occupy those seats. Staff may be divided on some issues, but they are unified in their assessment for the current principals and assistant principals. We have heard nothing but praise for Randy, Dawn, Eileen, Lisa and Tony. The support and accolades expressed for them suggests that staff believe that the right people are in the right jobs. This is echoed by parents, who join teachers in praising building administrators for their willingness to entertain new ideas, to engage in open discussion, and to respond to all needs as they arise. Most significant is what we heard from students. Leadership is accessible, respectful and encouraging of all students, not just verbally, but through concrete actions such as addressing the obstacles standing in the way of student growth and aspirations.

3. Academic rigor and a highly qualified faculty

Hunter has maintained a culture of high expectations and academic rigor even as changes in the CUNY system temporarily undermined that same culture historically found at Hunter College. These standards of excellence are what has sustained the Campus Schools by allowing them to continue to attract the best and brightest students New York City has to offer and by ensuring that only the most qualified and dedicated teachers are drawn to the school. A self-perpetuating cycle of excellent students requiring the best teachers is part of what ensure that Hunter will remain Hunter.

We must also take note that these same teachers sustained a program that has undergone a succession of administrative changes and ensured that the quality of students’ experiences was not compromised during difficult and less certain times. This does not surprise us—your teachers are gifted, too.

4. Academic freedom for students and teachers

All students and all teachers find support for all endeavors.

During my pre-team visit to the Hunter College Campus Schools in March, I paused to reflect that what happens here should happen in all schools—but it does not. At times, the Validation Team wrestled with our expectations that there would be a “Hunter Curriculum” and we will speak more on that soon. We agree that curriculum and curriculum alignment are quite important. It would be foolish to believe that it is not. But the fact is that these students must also be able to digress from the script and that teachers must be empowered to follow where the students lead.

No disrespect is meant by the implication that, often, it is the students who forge the path. We admired your Chair of Physical Education Department who very directly spoke about the challenge of working with students who know as much as your students know. And we have great respect for all educators who would take up the challenge of working with students who may sometimes force them out of their comfort zones.

5. Parental Support and involvement

No one believes in Hunter’s work and mission more, or expresses it more forcefully, than the parents of your students. Hunter’s parents have helped to ensure that new programs are always
within reach, that teachers and administrators are supported to the fullest, and that expectations for achievement and performance always remain high.

We understand that for Hunter parents, high expectations for achievement and performance is not reserved for their children – they also mean you. If at times parental involvement and scrutiny feels uncomfortable, we thing you will agree that it is a reasonable exchange for the generosity and faith they bestow on you.

6. Relationship to Hunter College

We recognize the complexity of the relationship between the Campus Schools and the College and understand the ways in which this relationship has imposed daunting challenges. We will speak to that shortly. We know, however, that you would agree the College brings you blessings as well.

While there has been a history of variable relationships between the college and school, the current relationship appears to be stronger than it has been for many years. A very active commitment to the campus schools has been expressed by the College President. The Campus Schools not only have access to the full resources of the colleges, including their financial resources and legal services, but the College facilities as well as intellectual and academic opportunities are being made available to Hunter High School students more than ever before. There is every reason to believe this trend will continue.

These, then, represent what we would view as strengths and resources of the Hunter Campus Schools. In determining the critical issues for the school, the Validation Team found it could best serve you, not just by pointing out issues that may have escaped you, but in validating and systematically articulating those you already identified and know well.

1. Expansion of stakeholder involvement in the planning process

Middle States believes strongly in the presence of broad-based stakeholder involvement. Beyond internal staff, parents and students, schools are encouraged to seek external partners who can inform the process, validate the ways in which your work already prepares your students to meet the needs of business and community, and, when need be, even serve as the “loyal opposition” ensuring that your vision does not become myopic or insular. The island known as “Hunter” must especially guard against this.

The Middle States process presented you with an opportunity to strengthen those partnerships, particularly during the period of self study. Today, for instance, we learned that were are strong connections with such organizations as Mt. Sinai Hospital, Merrill Lynch, the 92nd Street YMCA and many, many others. They could have been informing your planning process, but we did not see evidence of this.

It is not too late. Hunter has always shown the capacity to forge partnerships and create connections on behalf of its student whenever it is required. We urge you to also do so now on behalf of your organization and in the pursuit of your organizational objectives. These connections may prove to be key to the achievement of all your goals.

2. Creation of systems and standardization of procedures
The Team has been left with the impression that, while day-to-day operations of the school run smoothly, there are places where things are not systemized. In some cases, action is taken in response to situations as they emerge, but perhaps not until they emerge. Some examples follow:

- We are told that there is no sustained mentoring program or a comprehensive induction for new teachers. Teachers reported that the single orientation day they received was insufficient and did not adequately introduce them to the curriculum or provide them with the needed understanding of the school’s procedures and policies.

- We heard about the lack of a current Teachers’ Handbook. While one had been developed in the past, administrative turnover rendered the document irrelevant. New as well as veteran teachers are now clamoring for written guidance on rules and policies that will authoritatively establish the procedures they must follow in any given area.

- Hunter’s teacher evaluation practices are original and non-traditional. Teachers are evaluated by teachers. However, we were told that teachers cannot always expect a consistently implemented evaluation process as practiced by their colleagues on the Personnel and Budget Committee. While we cannot ascertain the degree to which this is typical, we believe you should endeavor to do so.

- We identified the capacity of the school to creatively respond to individual students as one of Hunter’s special strengths. We believe that creating procedures and vehicles to proactively identify unique student needs would facilitate provision of the required specialized supports. Moreover, we believe that an outgrowth of this proactive approach could be the establishment of new connections leading to ongoing partnerships, which in turn could serve the needs of Hunter’s students on an ongoing basis.

- Lastly, we think the school needs to deepen the planning that will ensure that the work on the objectives goes steadily forward. We commend you for your appointment of an Internal Coordinator, who will be pivotal in creating the structures that allow this to happen.

3. Expanding the use of data

At several points during the Visit, the Validation Team inquired about specific data points. “How do students from the elementary school do once they come to the high school?”; “What do you know about long term outcomes for Hunter graduates?” “What does the data tell you about the performance of students who enter the High School from the Elementary School?”

The school was able to offer perceptual and anecdotal data, especially when we spoke to those members of your staff that have the benefit of longevity. We also believe that the raw data needed to be able to answer these and other questions are probably gathered—or that the systems that are needed to pull that data together could be quickly assembled. We are less clear that deeper data analysis is regularly and systematically occurring. We believe that such probes are critical, that they should be a part of the organizational process, and that they need to be understood by all so as to inform the important educational and programmatic decisions that are made.

4. Reconciling the debate about admissions practices

Hunter is steeped in proud history and beloved traditions. “Hunter Girls” paved the way for the “Hunter Student” and long after they have left these classrooms, graduates recall their time here
and the exhilaration they felt to be part of an elite club. History has worked well for those of you who came before—but it may be serving as an obstacle for some whose time is now.

We have heard a great deal about how one gains admission to this club—enough to know that feelings about your current processes run quite high and may even threaten to destabilize relationships.

You are smart people—you have to be to be able to serve these students. Surely there is a solution? Certainly reasonable people can strike compromises that can reconcile the differences? Everyone we met—including the President to the College—clearly stated that the attainment of diversity is a goal for the Hunter College Campus Schools. The Team has concluded that it is not a matter of gathering good ideas, identifying research-based methods, or resolving logistics—it is a matter of will and true motivation. The Validation Team believes that accepting challenges is bedrock in the Hunter culture. Take on this challenge and find a way to make Hunter look more like the vibrant city it has called home for more than 100 years.

5. Facilities that could support growth

We are charmed by the “brick prison” and we envy you for being able to work in such a wonderful neighborhood. Like all school buildings, this one presents challenges:

These several issues for which the allocation of space and the need to develop that space will be a factor:

- The school has reported that it is in the preliminary stages of discussion and planning in order to bring about a middle school model at Hunter College Campus Schools.
- There are many clubs and after-school activities that must receive equal consideration and access.
- Some find the halls difficult to pass as students use them as a much needed gathering area—
- And the elevator is a pain in the neck.

The solutions to these other issues are all affected by the limitations imposed on you by the current facilities. The tail is wagging the dog.

We understand that capital projects will address some of the facilities issues and that the College leadership has taken a serious interest as well. These are good indicators that the school understands that space and housing help drive the quality of educational programs and the capacity for organizational improvement and growth.

6. Curriculum alignment

Earlier you were commended for the academic freedom and flexibility afforded to teachers and students. We hope that our support for your plans to achieve vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum do not appear to contradict that. It is a complicated dance you do, trying to develop and implement a rich core curriculum while still protecting the capacity of students and teachers to strike out in new direction. Attaining and maintaining the needed balance will not be easy. But the goal is an appropriate one and we think it is aligned with our next critical issue.
7. Recognition of the importance of the elementary school

The relationship between the elementary and high school staff is not unlike the relationship between Hunter Campus Schools in general and the College. It is complicated. You are members of a close and loyal family and like all siblings you bicker.

Here is what is clear to us: you need each other. The stronger connection currently desired by elementary staff with high school staff reflects the right instinct. We believe that the partnerships and relationships being sought need to become institutionalized and part of the future culture of the Campus Schools. The curriculum alignment is an excellent place to begin that needed collaboration.

But the collaboration can take place in a variety of forums: monthly meetings, professional development events, adult-guided interactions between older and younger students, and interdisciplinary projects across the grade levels are some examples. Be prepared that these collaborations may lead in some unexpected and at times uncomfortable places; for instance, the aforementioned debates about admissions practices and diversity will surface.

Despite what may be awkward moments, we would urge you to persevere and find the ways needed to deepen the relationships between elementary and high school staff.

8. The relationship between the College and the Campus Schools

Earlier we spoke of the ways your connection to the College serves you. Now we take note of the ways in which it creates unfortunate “speed bumps”. Certainly the biggest issue is the challenge of working through the huge bureaucracy that is CUNY. The College leadership has clearly told us that they do not interfere with your decisions on anything to do with the education of your students; that you are free to run your gifted programs as you see fit. You, however, have been equally clear that the Campus Schools must often educate the College on what it is like to be a K-12 school.

Dr. Raab did an excellent job of helping us understand how CUNY’s decision to institute open enrollment ultimately affected the relationship between the college and campus schools. While this is beginning to resolve itself as students find increasing opportunity at the College, she recognizes that some of you may still be a bit wary.

One notable example of tension involves the recruitment of needed staff. We have been led to understand that the process for creating job descriptions, placing needed advertisements, and ensuring that the final candidates are chosen and appointed in a timely manner is hugely undermined by the college bureaucracy.

Another critical example of the struggle has already been mentioned—the debate over admissions procedures and how the desire for diversity will require a re-examination of Hunter procedures and values.

These are all significant issues and will require some difficult discussions and some hard choices—both on an institutional and personal basis.

Please be assured that the comments that we made to you today are offered in the spirit of support and to encourage your continued growth. We make them as “critical friends” who are rooting for, and have every confidence in, your success. The issues we raise are not raised lightly and we expect
that you have not received them lightly. We also expect that you will address them and create solutions that add to the many reasons you have to be proud of your school and each other.

In consideration of your strengths, your commitment to growth, and the quality of the work you do, it is with great pleasure that the Validation Team informs you that we will recommend that the Hunter College Campus Schools receive Middle States accreditation.

As we prepare to leave you, and you prepare for a much deserved celebration, we offer some final words. This is no doubt feels like an ending and culmination of much hard work. It is indeed an important milestone, but be equally clear that this is no ending. It is just the beginning. It is a very good beginning, but a beginning nevertheless.

The end of a Middle States Visit is always a bittersweet experience. Anxious to return to our homes and families, we are nevertheless aware that we will miss each other and all of you. I would like to thank the members of the Validation Team for their hard work and the support they extended to me. And we all wish to thank you for gracious hospitality and care.

To each of you, we extend our personal best wishes for your continued success.