

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
BROOKLYN EMERGING LEADERS
ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL
VISIT DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 2018
REPORT DATE: JULY 2, 2018*

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

A collection of colorful pencils and paper clips is arranged on a dark grey, textured background. The pencils, in various colors including green, blue, red, pink, orange, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, and brown, are lined up diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. Several paper clips in colors like orange, light green, pink, and blue are scattered around the pencils, some overlapping them.

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute’s (the “Institute’s”) observations and findings from its February 27, 2018 first year school evaluation visit to the Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy Charter School (“BELA” or the “education corporation”).

REPORT FORMAT

As with all SUNY authorized charter schools, on a periodic basis throughout the term of the school’s charter the Institute conducts a number of formal site visits. The Institute reports in writing to the school on data gathered during these visits. Cumulatively, the information in reports such as this and those issued in later years, forms the foundation of qualitative data on the school’s effectiveness. At the conclusion of the school’s charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “SUNY Trustees”) an analysis of the school’s performance over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for the school based on two components: the school’s attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the school’s educational program collected during school evaluation visits.

At renewal, the Institute evaluates the academic, organizational, legal and fiscal aspects of the school’s program using the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the “SUNY Renewal Benchmarks”; see attachment). For formal school evaluation visits conducted prior to renewal, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

Although the information provided in this report is not prescriptive, the Institute would expect school leadership to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school’s academic program or other aspects of the school. In this regard, please be aware that although the Institute takes very seriously the conclusions provided, staff members are cognizant of the fact that a one-day site visit may not yield information on all facets of a school’s program.

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for BELA on June 13, 2016. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2017, initially serving 58 students in 9th grade. The school operates in co-located space at 125 Stuyvesant Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11221 within New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 16. Over the current charter term, BELA will grow to serve 314 students in 9th- 12th grade.

BELA’s mission states:



BELA’s mission is to empower each young woman to be the best version of herself. Through a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, service learning initiatives, and a commitment to cultivating a spirit of resilience within each young woman, BELA students will attend and graduate from college.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of BELA’s facility at the above address on August 18, 2017, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that the education corporation had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the Education Corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,¹ describe the elements in place at schools that are highly effective at providing students from low-income backgrounds the instruction, content, knowledge, and skills necessary to produce strong academic performance. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.²

For first year visits, the Institute focuses on academic program benchmarks to establish a baseline measure of the quality of the school's systems and procedures which heavily affect the progress that a school is able to demonstrate in meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter term. The Institute expects a school to have moved from the beginning of implementation and the promise of future growth to full and effective implementation of a quality program by the time the school comes to renewal.

DOES BELA HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

BELA regularly gathers assessment data and uses it to adjust instruction. The school administers both standardized and curriculum-based assessments, and teachers and school leaders utilize these data to ensure that students receive academic support targeted to their needs.

- BELA regularly administers both standardized and curriculum-based assessments. Students take the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress ("MAP") exam in August, January, and May, which enables teachers and school leaders to track their academic growth relative to a common standard over the course of the school year. The school also administers cumulative trimester exams in each subject every 12 weeks in order to evaluate student performance in core content areas and determine whether students have retained the content necessary to pass the Regents exams, which students take in June. Additionally, internally developed interim assessments based on Regents exams take place in each subject at the end of every six-week unit and provide teachers with timely information about student content mastery.

SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

1. An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: www.gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf; and scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf.

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available at: www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- BELA makes assessment results accessible to families through a regular cycle of progress reports and conferences. Every six weeks, parents receive a progress report detailing their student's academic performance and participate in a student-led conference with teachers, during which students assess their own performance and set goals for the next six weeks. Students also actively monitor their own performance as part of leadership academy, the school's mentoring and advisory program. During the leadership academy block, which takes place three mornings per week, students meet with a teacher advisor to review the student's grades and discuss areas for growth. Some teachers utilize a smartphone application to send messages and reminders to students and parents who opt in. Teachers also regularly communicate with parents via phone, and parents and students can access grades via Alma, the school's web-based platform for tracking student grades and assessment data. Teachers update student grades in Alma every Tuesday, and students receive a formal report card at the end of every 12-week trimester.
- Teachers at BELA regularly use assessment data to adjust instruction. At the beginning of the school year, teachers used MAP assessment data to identify struggling readers then administered the Qualitative Reading Inventory ("QRI") to those students to assess their needs further. Based on these data, teachers developed individual support plans for struggling readers. Additionally, the school schedule includes twice weekly learning labs, during which teachers pull small groups of students for tutoring or re-teaching or assign work to individual students based on their specific needs. Teachers frequently use the data stored in Alma to differentiate instruction, such as when they split students into small groups during class based on their level of mastery of specific skills. Mathematics teachers at BELA use an online mathematics program called IXL to diagnose students' skill levels and provide classroom and homework assignments tailored to students' individual needs. English teachers use a common tracker to monitor student mastery of reading and writing standards and utilize these data when developing lessons.

DOES BELA'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Teachers at BELA implement both commercial and internally developed curricula that support them in their planning and delivery of instruction. The school has clear systems and structures that enable teachers to receive feedback on their curricular materials.

- Teachers at BELA implement a variety of commercial and internally developed curricula, and they know what to teach and when to teach it based on the materials provided with these curricula. Mathematics teachers implement an open source curriculum developed by New Visions for Public Schools ("New Visions") and aligned to New York

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

State standards that includes guiding documents such as curriculum maps and scope and sequences. In the school's ethnic studies classes, which combine topics from English, humanities, and history, the school implements an internally developed curriculum that teachers collaborated to develop during the summer using materials drawn from a variety of sources such as ethnic studies curricula from other schools and colleges. Teachers in living environment classes utilize an inquiry-based curriculum developed by the Center for Education Policy Analysis ("CEPA") and supplement it with materials from New Visions in order to ensure its alignment with New York State standards. The curriculum for BELA's STEAM classes comes from STEM Fuse, a commercial curriculum that incorporates coding and computer science. BELA also offers classes in Latin, in which teachers implement a commercial curriculum called Latin for the New Millennium, as well as classes in digital media literacy, the curriculum for which teachers develop internally. The school expects to be able to increase its capacity to support teachers' ability to develop curriculum with the hiring of a director of curriculum and instruction for the upcoming year.

- Teachers at BELA have access to ample curricular materials that support them in meeting the educational needs of all students. Whether they implement an internally developed or commercial curriculum, teachers are responsible for regularly submitting curricular materials to the principal for review; scope and sequence documents are due at the beginning of each school year, and unit plans are due two to three weeks before the start of a new unit. The head of school reviews these documents and provides feedback via Google Docs or informally during check-ins. Teachers frequently modify their curricular materials in order to ensure that they meet the specific needs of students in their classes and align to New York State standards so that students are prepared for end of year Regents exams.

IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT BELA?

Quality instruction is generally evident at BELA. Teachers consistently deliver purposeful lessons and maintain a classroom environment focused on academic achievement. However, teachers miss opportunities to regularly and effectively check for student understanding and challenge students with questions that encourage higher-order thinking. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted 11 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

GRADE		
	9	
CONTENT AREA	Ethnic Studies	2
	Government	1
	Algebra	2
	Science	2
	STEAM	1
	Latin	2
	Digital Media	1
	Total	11

- Teachers at BELA consistently deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (10 out of 11 lessons observed). Teachers regularly post the objective at the front of the classroom and refer to it throughout the lesson to ensure students understand what they should be able to do by the end of class. The posted objectives are clear and focused on a discrete, measurable skill, as evidenced by all objectives starting with the phrase "students will be able to." In integrated co-teaching ("ICT") classrooms, where a general education and special education teacher deliver instruction jointly, teachers have clear roles, such as one classroom in which both co-teachers deliver direct instruction throughout the class with seamless transitions from one teacher to the other.
- A minority of teachers at BELA regularly and effectively use techniques to check for understanding (4 out of 11 lessons observed). While some teachers circulate around the classroom and provide students with one-on-one support based on what teachers observe, most teachers circulate to monitor student engagement and behavior and miss opportunities to evaluate student learning and respond accordingly. Although several teachers implement check for understanding strategies such as directing students to give a thumbs up or down to indicate their understanding or asking for a choral response, teachers do not require all students to respond and often move on to the next phase of the lesson without ascertaining whether all students have demonstrated that they understand. Additionally, in several classrooms teachers call only on students who volunteer to answer questions, which results in a small number of students actively participating in lessons.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Few teachers at BELA include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher order thinking and problem solving skills (4 out of 11 lessons observed). A majority of teachers miss opportunities to have students engage in higher order thinking by examining, analyzing, interpreting, or summarizing information. Most of the questions teachers ask require students to apply lower level skills such as recalling basic facts or repeating what another student has said. Teachers who do include opportunities for higher-order thinking challenge students to defend and elaborate on their answers and interact with their peers, as evidenced by one classroom where a teacher directed students to review their partners' work and identify errors.
- A majority of teachers at BELA establish and maintain a classroom environment with a consistent focus on academic achievement (7 out of 11 lessons observed). In classrooms where students are consistently engaged in academic work, teachers implement strategies such as timing students and providing clear directions to communicate a sense of urgency and minimize time wasted during transitions. If students are off task, teachers address their behavior in a way that does not interrupt the flow of the lesson. In classrooms where there is not a consistent focus on academics, teachers neglect to redirect students when they are disengaged, or teachers do not provide clear directions so that students know what the teacher expects of them.

DOES BELA HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

BELA has strong instructional leadership and is establishing systems to support the development of all staff, including conducting regular observations of teachers and providing teachers with multiple opportunities for professional development from both internal and external sources.

- BELA's leadership team has established an environment of high expectations for teacher and student performance with a clear emphasis on building a strong school culture and focus on academic achievement, and BELA's instructional leadership team supports the development of its teaching staff. BELA's head of school is the primary instructional leader while the dean of student life also provides support to teachers, specifically focusing on culture and classroom management.
- The head of school provides coaching and supervision to teachers by observing each teacher once per week and following up immediately with written feedback. Each teacher also has a weekly one-on-one meeting with the head of school during which

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

they discuss next steps from observations and check in on progress toward long-term professional goals. The head of school provides further instructional support by occasionally co-teaching and providing feedback on lesson plans. The amount of time the head of school has been able to dedicate to regular coaching has been constrained in the latter half of the school year due to competing responsibilities, primarily new teacher hiring. To remedy this, BELA intends to hire a director of curriculum and instruction for the upcoming year who will primarily focus on instructional support and coaching, thus increasing the leadership team’s capacity to develop teachers.

- BELA provides multiple regular professional development activities and opportunities that assist teachers in meeting student academic needs. All staff members attend weekly meetings on Friday afternoon during which instructional staff members provide professional development on selected topics. In addition, the school uses a “critical friends group” structure wherein groups of teachers meet weekly in small groups to provide one another with feedback on lesson plans. Teachers also have the opportunity to attend external professional development sessions such as New Visions trainings in other cities and states.
- At the time of the Institute’s visit instructional leaders at BELA had begun to conduct teacher evaluations based on clear criteria. The head of school leads the formal teacher evaluation process, for which the school uses a variation of the Danielson framework. In consultation with the head of school, teachers create individual professional goals at the beginning of the school year based on the Danielson framework and use them as a point of reference during check-in meetings throughout the school year. The head of school conducts formal observations in December and May and provides teachers with a written review after each formal observation that takes into account teachers’ progress toward their goals. School leaders also use the Danielson framework to develop long-term professional development plans for teachers, prioritizing particular growth areas based on weaknesses they notice.

DOES BELA MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

BELA addresses the educational needs of at-risk students through the implementation of a variety of supports, including an ICT model, one-on-one and small group tutoring, and regular check-ins between special education teachers and students.

- BELA has clearly defined procedures for identifying and screening at-risk students and providing them with appropriate interventions. Because students enter in 9th grade, the school can examine students’ records in the Automate the Schools (“ATS”) database and,

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

if applicable, their existing Individualized Education Programs (“IEPs”) to identify students with disabilities and English language learners (“ELLs”). In addition, the school uses data from assessments to identify struggling students. Based on data from the MAP, QRI, and six-week interim assessments, teachers and school leaders identify students struggling academically and determine the supports these students receive during learning labs, which include small group and one-on-one tutoring as well as assigning students to watch Khan Academy videos, online, open source instructional videos on a range of topics. BELA conducts a school-wide review of student performance every six weeks, at which time teachers and learning specialists meet to discuss whether students have made progress and whether additional interventions and/or referral to the Committee on Special Education (“CSE”) for evaluation is necessary.

- BELA meets the needs of students with disabilities primarily through the implementation of an ICT model, in which a general education teacher and special education teacher deliver instruction jointly. The school employs two full-time special education certified learning specialists who co-teach two of BELA’s four class sections with a general education teacher. One of the learning specialists focuses on the humanities while the other focuses on mathematics and science support. The two learning specialists also support the school’s 14 students with disabilities throughout the day through a combination of push-in coaching within classes and pull-out small group support and tutoring. This includes leading Special Education Teacher Support Services (“SETSS”) groups twice per week during learning lab for students whose IEPs mandate it. Learning specialists also check in with students daily to provide coaching on critical co-academic skills such as effectively planning long-term assignments.
- BELA does not have a formal language acquisition program for ELLs, and the school does not employ a teacher certified in English as a second language (“ESL”). The school’s current approach to English language instruction is a full immersion model coupled with additional interventions. Specifically, the school provides extra daily tutoring, scaffolded or modified lesson materials, and 80 minutes of one-on-one language acquisition support each week. BELA also provides access to instructional videos on the Khan Academy website, which are available in a variety of languages. Additionally, the humanities learning specialist conducts check-ins during ethnic studies classes. The school recognizes that more formal structures are required to meet the needs of a growing school population and is planning for how to serve a larger ELL population effectively in coming years.
- General education and special education teachers leverage multiple opportunities to coordinate planning to support at-risk students. The two learning specialists have led several all staff professional development sessions throughout the year, such as a session on how to understand an IEP. In addition, learning specialists and general

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

education teachers meet frequently on an informal basis to review and modify lesson plans to ensure lessons meet the needs of all students. School leaders note that there is opportunity to formalize structures next year to ensure that collaboration continues as the student population increases.

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DOES THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM?

BELA has an organizational structure that enables it to deliver the educational program effectively. The school's operations team implements a robust set of systems that allow teachers to focus the bulk of their time and energy on instructional tasks, and school leaders have cultivated a school culture focused on academic achievement.

- BELA has a clear administrative structure in place wherein members of the leadership team divide instructional and operational responsibilities among themselves. The leadership team consists of the head of school, dean of advancement, dean of operations, and dean of student life. There are clear lines of reporting, and school leaders meet regularly both as a team and with their direct reports. Notably, the leadership team engages in its own weekly professional development in order to continue to develop their capacity as effective managers.
- The school has established a safe and orderly environment. The school facility is clean and well organized, and there is space for teachers and other school staff to carry out the activities required to meet students' instructional needs. In addition, the dean of student life leads training and coaching for staff on classroom management and culture, thus contributing to an environment that is welcoming, orderly, and supportive of students.
- The school allocates ample resources to teachers in support of achieving its goals, and teachers have access to a variety of curricular and other materials. Notably, the school makes strategic use of educational technology, supplying each student with a laptop and using Google Classroom to streamline lesson planning, lesson delivery, and student data collection. In addition, teachers clearly understand whom to go to should they need additional resources or support.

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Although BELA was authorized to serve 85 students during the 2017-18 school year, the school's enrollment at the time of the Institute's visit was 65 students. School leaders report that numerous students whose families accepted their enrollment offer and attended new student orientation did not ultimately matriculate. School leaders recognize this issue and are implementing strategies to meet the school's chartered enrollment in 2018-19. To date, the school has received 200 applications for the 2018-19 school year and anticipates an enrollment of 170. Specific strategies used to increase enrollment and retention include:

- Distributing marketing materials and student applications in multiple languages;
- Meeting on-one-one with middle school guidance counselors of surrounding schools;
- Leveraging bilingual staff members in student recruitment efforts;
- Offering multiple sections of integrated co-teaching and small class sizes; and,
- Meeting with families of students every six weeks.

DOES THE SCHOOL BOARD WORK EFFECTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THE SCHOOL'S ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS?

The school board effectively monitors student achievement and provides oversight to the total educational program.

- The BELA board has adequate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school. Board members possess a variety of backgrounds in professions such as education, finance, philanthropy, and law, which enable them to support the successful functioning of the school and oversee it effectively. Eight of the board's ten founding members remain. As stipulated in the Charter Agreement, the board consistently submits monthly meeting minutes to the Institute in a timely fashion. Additionally, the board has demonstrated its commitment to the school by agreeing to raise \$25,000 in donations.
- The board receives sufficient information from the head of school to provide rigorous oversight. School leaders regularly attend board meetings and provide board members with pertinent information about the school. At each board meeting, the head of school provides board members with a dashboard that conveys critical information to the board about student performance, school operations, and parent relations. The board further reviews matters pertinent to the school through its committee structure, which includes the following committees: executive, finance, academic, and facilities.

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

BROOKLYN EMERGING LEADERS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES³

CHAIR

Andre McKenzie, Ed D

TREASURER

Michael Lackwood

SECRETARY

Diane Nathaniel

TRUSTEES

Alma Mends

Anastasia Dubov

Keara Smalls

Nicole Charette

Janet Kinney

Brenda Canty

Ebette Fortune

Annette Knuckle

SCHOOL LEADERS

Nicia Fullwood, Head of School (2017 - Present)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ⁴	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2017-18	85	65	76%	9	9

3. Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.

4. Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
February 27, 2018	Maureen Foley	Director for New Charters
	Keegan Prue	Program Analyst

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
Sisterhood: BELA is a place where young women discover their talents and passions and grow into agents of change.	+
Scholarship: BELA is committed to providing a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.	+
Strength: BELA develops students' social and emotional health by focusing on the principles of relationships, mind and body, creativity, purpose, and growth mindset.	+
Service: BELA encourages leadership and volunteerism and addresses the service learning aspect of the mission by developing students' advocacy, public speaking, and debate skills.	+