



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# **Achievement First Bushwick Charter School**

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## **School Evaluation Report 2008-2009**

Visit Conducted: April 30, 2009

Report Issued: December 17, 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), jointly with the New York State Board of Regents, are required by law to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the State University Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The State University Trustees, however, consistent with the goals of the New York State Charter Schools Act of 1998, view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively than purely monitoring compliance. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Charter Schools Institute (“the Institute”) to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals:

- **Facilitate Improvement.** By providing substantive information about the school’s academic, fiscal and organizational strengths and weaknesses to the school’s board of trustees, administration, faculty and other staff, the Institute can play a role in helping the school identify areas for improvement.
- **Disseminate Information.** The Institute disseminates information about the school’s performance not only to its board of trustees, administration and faculty, but to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located.
- **Document Performance.** The Institute collects information to build a database of a school’s performance over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute can more clearly ascertain trends, determine areas of strength and weakness, and assess the school’s likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute is in a better position to make recommendations regarding the renewal of each school’s charter, and the State University Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school’s charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

The Institute regularly collects a range of data about each school’s performance over the course of the charter period, which ultimately contributes to its renewal recommendation. These data include student performance results, financial audits, any legal records of issues addressed, board meeting minutes, and reports from regular evaluation visits conducted by the Institute (or external experts contracted by the Institute) and other agencies with oversight responsibilities.

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding this year’s visit to the school. The second section, titled School Description, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. Finally, this report presents the evidence and conclusions from an evaluation visit conducted in the current school year in a third section, titled School Evaluation Visit. Within this section is a summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations.

Because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement with respect to the school’s performance as compared to the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks. To the extent appropriate and useful, we encourage school boards to use this evaluation report in ongoing planning and school improvement efforts.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

Based on the analysis of evidence gathered during an evaluation visit to the Achievement First Bushwick Charter School (“AF Bushwick”) on April 30, 2009, the school appears to be making adequate progress towards achieving its mission. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

### *Academic Success*

AF Bushwick regularly administers a variety of useful internal and external assessments and has procedures in place to systematically collect and analyze assessment results. Robust procedures for using data to identify students for remediation and to adjust and improve classroom instruction are in place across the school based on standards-based interim assessments that are administered every six weeks. The school has developed a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned to state standards, and teachers plan and implement purposeful lessons with clearly articulated learning objectives. Students across the school are engaged in learning activities, and instruction at AF Bushwick’s elementary grades is consistently rigorous and promotes the development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills. In the middle school grades, instruction did not consistently promote critical thinking or higher order problem-solving skills.

School leaders at AF Bushwick set high expectations for student achievement. Instructional leaders use a coaching model to provide teachers with ongoing and systematic support that is focused on student progress and teacher performance. AF Bushwick provides sufficient resources to meet a range of student needs and has a number of interventions in place, both within and outside of the classroom. AF Bushwick is safe and orderly and has created a culture where learning is valued. Finally, the school has a sustained, comprehensive, professional development program with components that are tailored to individual teachers’ needs.

### *Organizational Capacity*

AF Bushwick has remained faithful to its mission and has fully implemented the key design elements included in its charter. The school has also met the non-academic goals outlined in its Accountability Plan. The school partners with Achievement First, a non-profit organization that functions as a charter management organization and is a part of the Achievement First network of schools.

The day-to-day operations of AF Bushwick are effectively managed, and the organizational structure of the school provides distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The school currently houses elementary students and middle school students in two separate buildings. Each site has a principal to whom all others report, and each principal has a leadership team consisting of academic deans, deans of students, the director of operations, and a special education coordinator.

The board of trustees of AF Bushwick has worked to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the school’s educational program. The board understands that student achievement is the core business of the school and regularly reviews and discusses student performance data. At the time of the visit, the board had recently approved a process to formally evaluate the school, the charter management organization, and itself.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application to establish the Achievement First Bushwick Charter School (“AF Bushwick”) on January 24, 2006, and the school’s charter became effective by operation of law on June 27, 2006. The school opened in the fall of 2006 with an enrollment of 163 students in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The school has added one elementary and one middle school grade each year and plans to continue this pattern through the end of its initial charter, projecting an enrollment of 688 students in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2010-11. The school currently serves 517 students in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Originally located at 84 Schaefer Street in Brooklyn, the school expanded to two buildings at the start of the 2007-08 school year. The elementary grades are currently located at 1137 Herkimer Street, and the middle school grades are located at 1300 Greene Avenue.

The school partners with the Achievement First, a non-profit organization that functions as a charter management organization and is part of the Achievement First network of schools. According to the school’s charter application, Achievement First was created to bring to scale the impressive student achievement results of the nationally-acclaimed Amistad Academy, founded in 1999 in New Haven, Connecticut. The specific services provided by the Achievement First organization include: principal training and evaluation; a continuously refined curriculum, interim assessment system, and an intranet containing curricular and other school resources; staff development; and budget services.

As of the date of the current school evaluation, the Board of Trustees of AF Bushwick was comprised of the following individuals:

- Dr. Deborah Shanley, Chair;
- Mr. Doug McCurry;
- Mr. Emerson Moore;
- Ms. Iris Chen;
- Mr. Jalak Jobanputra;
- Ms. Judith Rodriguez;
- Ms. Marilyn Rivera;
- Ms. Shannon Kete; and
- Ms. Yvette Best.

AF Bushwick’s mission statement is as follows:

*The mission of Achievement First Bushwick Charter School is to provide students with the academic and character skills they need to excel in top colleges, to succeed in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.*

Key program elements include:

- an unwavering focus on breakthrough student achievement, including fully closing the achievement gap;
- consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum, including what is taught at every grade level is defined clearly and systematically so that all essential content is mastered over time;
- interim assessments and strategic use of performance data, including standards-based assessments administered every 6 weeks in all the core subjects and individual instructional plans developed in conjunction with school leaders for each teacher based on the assessment results;
- more time on task, including three hours daily for reading instruction in elementary grades and three hours of instruction in reading and writing in the middle school grades;
- principals with the power to lead;
- increased supervision of the quality of instruction, including a School Manager to handle operational issues, a Dean of Students to coordinate discipline, and an Academic Dean in the school's second year, all of which will free the Principal up to focus on instruction;
- aggressive recruitment of teaching talent;
- discipline, achievement-oriented school culture;
- rigorous, high-quality, focused training for principals and leaders, including a "residency" year before implementing the program and a minimum of 3 weeks of high-quality professional development before the school year begins for all teachers; and
- parents and community as partners, including parent "contracts."

### **School Year (2007-08)**

196 Instructional Days<sup>1</sup>

### **School Day (2007-08)**

7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (Monday thru Thursday)<sup>2</sup>

7:30 a.m. to 1:50 p.m. (Friday)

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<sup>1</sup> According to the school's charter, the school year includes a required three-week (15 instructional days) summer academy.

<sup>2</sup> According to the school's charter, 7:30 to 7:50 a.m. is used for breakfast, morning work, and tutoring; 3:40 to 4:00 p.m. is used for dismissal; 3:45 to 4:50 p.m. is used for intensive tutoring; and 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. for Homework Club.

**Enrollment**

| School Year | Original Chartered Enrollment | Revised Chartered Enrollment | Actual Enrollment <sup>3</sup> | Original Chartered Grades | Complying |
|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 2006-07     | 162                           | NA                           | 163                            | K-1                       | Yes       |
| 2007-08     | 318                           | 335                          | 360                            | K-2, 5                    | No        |
| 2008-09     | 471                           | NA                           | 517                            | K-3, 5-6                  | No        |
| 2009-10     | 620                           |                              |                                | K-7                       |           |
| 2010-11     | 688                           |                              |                                | K-8                       |           |

**Demographic Data<sup>4</sup>**

|   | 2006-07                      |                               | 2007-08                      |                               |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|   | Percent of School Enrollment | Percent of CSD #32 Enrollment | Percent of School Enrollment | Percent of CSD #32 Enrollment |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                       |                              |                               |                              |                               |
| American Indian or Alaska Native            | 0                            | 0                             | 0                            | 0                             |
| Black or African American                   | 66                           | 26                            | 74                           | 26                            |
| Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander | 1                            | 2                             | 1                            | 2                             |
| Hispanic                                    | 27                           | 71                            | 26                           | 71                            |
| White                                       | 7                            | 1                             | 0                            | 1                             |
| Multiracial <sup>5</sup>                    | 0                            | 0                             | 0                            | 0                             |
| <b>Special Populations</b>                  |                              |                               |                              |                               |
| Students with Disabilities                  | 2                            | 12                            | N/A                          | N/A                           |
| Limited English Proficient                  | 0                            | 19                            | 2.6                          | 19                            |
| <b>Free and Reduced Lunch</b>               |                              |                               |                              |                               |
| Eligible for Free Lunch                     | 51                           | 81                            | 61                           | 86                            |
| Eligible for Reduced Lunch                  | 18                           | 5                             | 14                           | 5                             |

<sup>3</sup> Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the New York State Education Department School Report Card and Database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 Report Cards (New York State Education Department). Note that the State Education Department does not report special education data.

<sup>5</sup> Multiracial enrollment data were not collected statewide in the 2005-06 school year.

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

### **Background**

Regardless of the type of visit, Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are organized around a set of benchmarks that address the academic success of the school including teaching and learning, e.g. curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Called the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks, these established criteria are used on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

While the primary focus of the visit is an evaluation of the school's academic program, issues regarding compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed); where the Institute finds serious deficiencies relating to student health and safety in particular, it may take additional and immediate action. However, monitoring for compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit.

This section of the School Evaluation Report begins with a summary of the observations and conclusions from previous visits to the school. This information is used by evaluation teams in preparation for the visit and assists the observers in understanding the accomplishments and challenges that the school has faced. Similarly, this information provides the reader with insight into the Institute's monitoring of the school's academic program and conclusions from prior visits, including those conducted by external experts on behalf of the Institute. Following this summary is a detailed analysis of the observations and conclusions from this year's evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team, is provided.

### **Summary of Previous Evaluation Visits**

Two previous evaluation visits of Achievement First Bushwick were conducted: (1) the Charter Schools Institute conducted a First-Year Inspection Visit on April 11, 2007; and (2) an independent evaluation of AF Bushwick was conducted on behalf of the Institute by Class Measures on May 8 and 9, 2008. The evaluation teams observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. As a result of these evaluation visits, a letter and a report, respectively, were provided to the school's board of trustees. Both documents outlined the major conclusions from the visit, which are briefly summarized below.

The first-year letter raised questions about the level of differentiation among the student groupings and opportunities for re-teaching in the classroom. Notably, the second year evaluation team found sufficient evidence of both of these practices across the school. At the time of the second-year external evaluation visit, observers found that school had systems in place to analyze assessment data and that the school used assessments results to group students, identify individual student needs, and measures student progress. AF Bushwick administered a variety of internal and external assessments, including interim assessments aligned to New York State standards and developed by Achievement First, Inc.

According to the school's first-year letter, teachers had access to curricular materials through Achievement First and implemented several pre-packaged curricular programs (Direct Instruction Reading Mastery, Saxon Math, and the Full Option Science System) including scripted lesson plans.

The second-year evaluation team found that the school had a curriculum aligned to New York State performance standards and that teachers created lessons aligned to the curriculum.

The school's first-year letter raised questions about opportunities for collaboration among teachers and professional growth for novice teachers, while the second-year report stated that principals and academic deans were providing direct, ongoing coaching and support to individuals and teams of teachers. In its second year, the school implemented professional growth plans to guide the formal evaluation process of teachers. Further, teachers were provided with multiple professional development opportunities at the school and through the Achievement First network. The second-year evaluation team found that AF Bushwick's strong school culture promoted a culture of learning and students and families expressed satisfaction with the school.

Both the first-year letter and second-year evaluation report identified facility issues as a challenge for the school. Since the addition of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall of 2007, the school has been located at two sites. The board chair reported to the second year inspectors that the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades would move to yet another separate site for the 2008-2009 school year, isolating them from the lower grades. At that time, the board stated that finding a permanent location for the school was a high priority.

The first-year letter noted that the board met regularly and received reports from the school principal and Achievement First regarding students' academic performance. The second-year evaluation report, however, did not cite evidence that the board had received written reports from school leaders regarding school assessments or instructional strategies implemented by the principals. Further, both the letter and the report mentioned that the board had not conducted a formal evaluation of the school leader or of its management organization, Achievement First.

## **Current Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence**

### *Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)*

AF Bushwick regularly administers a variety of useful assessments. According to school leaders, the school administers Fountas and Pinnell as a benchmark assessment in the elementary grades and to place students in appropriate guided reading groups in the middle school grades. Elementary students take the math portion of the Terra Nova and the DRP in June. The school administers the New York State Testing Program as scheduled, and is in its second year of administering six-week interim assessments aligned with New York State standards. Consistent with the findings of the second-year evaluation report, these assessments are developed by Achievement First and are common throughout all Achievement First schools. At the classroom level, teachers in all grade levels reported, and were observed regularly using, exit tickets, which are brief two- or three-question forms completed by students at the end of lessons, as well as informal observation to evaluate whether students met daily lesson objectives.

AF Bushwick has procedures in place to systematically collect and analyze assessment results and effectively uses these results to identify students for remediation and to adjust and improve classroom instruction. In the elementary grades assessments are used to determine groupings within each classroom, and in the middle school grades for determining reading, linguistics and mathematics groups. As reported by the second-year inspection team, robust procedures for using data to inform instruction are in place across the school based on the six-week interim assessments (IAs). The assessment cycle was described by school leaders and teachers as follows: assessments are

administered every six weeks at the beginning of the week; the school receives results Friday at mid-day; teachers begin to review the data on Friday afternoon; and the following Monday is designated as a “Data Day,” dedicated to review, analysis, and action planning based on the results. The school uses an online data platform called Athena that is employed at all schools associated with Achievement First. As demonstrated to school inspectors, school leaders and teachers have access to a significant amount of student data through Athena, including aggregate network and school results as well as classroom level and individual student data. Teachers work individually, with their grade level team, and with coaches to analyze the data and create “DDPs,” or data-driven plans, for the next six weeks of instruction. These plans identify standards that teachers will re-teach to the whole class, to small groups of students with similar weaknesses during “intervention” class, and to individual students. The plans are monitored by teachers and coaches and tweaked as needed during the six week cycle. Student progress on the identified standards is measured by the next interim assessment.

Student and school performance results are shared with parents and community. The school has regular report card nights on which parents may come in to pick up their childrens’ report cards. School leaders also mentioned reporting school performance results regularly to the Parent Leadership Council and the board of trustees.

### *Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)*

AF Bushwick has developed a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned to standards. School leaders and teachers reported that Achievement First provides the school with scope and sequence documents for all grades and subjects that are aligned to both the interim assessments and New York State standards. The current curriculum is similar to that described in the second-year evaluation report.

Teachers across the school are well supported in what to teach and when to teach it. While the exact process varies by grade level and subject, teachers generally work from the Achievement First scope and sequence documents to develop unit plans, weekly lesson plans, and other curricular materials. In the elementary grades, one teacher per grade level develops the six-week aim sequence and weekly lesson plan for each subject area and shares it with the team. All teachers on the team then tailor the weekly plan to their specific students. Teachers draw on multiple resources to create lesson plans, including an archive of lessons and units on a shared server as well as numerous commercial curricular materials such as SRA, Fountas and Pinnell, Saxon Math, and Everyday Math. In the middle school grades, teachers access Achievement First-created units and lesson plans and also create their own curricular materials. Teachers reported working with their academic dean to develop their six-week aim sequences and either select or create lesson plans to ensure alignment. According to the middle grades principal, teachers utilize few commercial curricula except for specific remediation programs.

The school, with support from the Achievement First network, regularly reviews and develops its curriculum. As described above, the development of curriculum at the school is a dynamic process. The curriculum in some grade levels, kindergarten for example, is more established due to the tenure of its teachers and the number of years it has been taught at the school, while the curriculum in the upper grades is continually being refined. According to the principal of the middle school grades, as subjects and grades are taught again, the curriculum is being synthesized into more permanent units. Both the elementary and middle grades principals described a recent Achievement First-led curricular initiative in which schools examined their reading programs. This process led to an

increased focus on reading comprehension in the elementary grades and a shift from units based on common books to units focused on common reading skills in the middle school grades.

Both principals reported that they are anticipating the curricular implications of the elementary students' graduation to the middle school level in the fall of 2010. Other schools in the Achievement First network have made or will soon go through this process as well, and AF Bushwick school leaders and the network are learning from those experiences. The principals stated that "Team Curriculum" at Achievement First is currently revamping curriculum and assessment for the middle school grades accordingly.

### *Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)*

Teachers at AF Bushwick plan and implement purposeful lessons with objectives aligned to standards. On the day of the visit, lessons observed across the school were focused on clearly articulated learning objectives and often written in student-appropriate language. Teachers, particularly in the middle school grades, were observed making students aware of the lesson objective prior to beginning instruction. In all grades, observed lessons presented learning activities that supported students' achieving the lesson objectives, and teachers used a variety of formative assessment techniques to assess students' understanding throughout the course of lessons.

Students across the school are engaged in learning activities, and instruction in the elementary grades is consistently rigorous and promotes development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills. Elementary grade teachers demonstrated high expectations for all students, and observed lessons were age appropriate and rigorous. In kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students were engaged in learning activities that required them to predict, evaluate, discuss and make inferences. A 1<sup>st</sup> grade mathematics lesson on subtraction, for example, focused not only on the procedural skills involved, but also on the multiple ways to solve each problem and appropriate strategy selection. In 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, students were observed participating in small book groups in which the teacher probed their thinking and coached them to discuss the text with each other. In these grades, observed lessons often included students rotating to different activities, from a whole class lesson to small group work with a teacher to individual work.

In the middle school grades, students in the observed classes were engaged in purposeful learning activities aligned to standards, but many lessons did not promote critical thinking or problem solving skills. All lessons observed by inspectors followed an "I, We, You" format. Mathematics classes, for example, consisted of the teacher presenting one type of problem and students taking notes on the steps they would follow to solve the type of problem presented. The teacher guided students through a set of practice problems. The answers were reviewed as a class and students then worked independently on a longer set of practice problems; the teacher circulated to observe student work and provide guidance to students who struggled. After a set amount of time had passed, the teacher reconvened students to review the answers to independent practice problems. The assigned problems were not structured to challenge students as they moved through them, but only to provide them with further practice of the procedures taught. The questions did not require students to perform original thinking or apply deep conceptual understanding.

English language arts classes in the middle school grades followed the same "I,We,You" format described above, and students were engaged in the observed lessons. In most classes observed by inspectors, instruction was focused on a particular skill, such as identifying the main idea. Teachers were observed presenting the skill and then giving students time to practice. During the whole-class

discussion, teachers remained at the comprehension level of questioning, generally accepting student responses without encouraging them to explain their ideas or evaluate others.

As described in the second-year evaluation report, instruction at AF Bushwick is differentiated to meet individual student needs. Students in all grades are grouped within classrooms by reading proficiency level. In the elementary grades, each classroom has two distinct leveled groupings of students and two teachers; in the middle school grades, classrooms are homogeneously grouped. Inspectors observed that the lower performing groups had fewer students, and teachers used more scaffolding and reinforcements in their lessons. Students in the same grade were observed using different texts in English language arts. Several teachers reported that they also differentiate student assignments. Inspectors observed that instruction was further differentiated through small group instruction within classrooms. Small groups received more guidance and support in completing the assigned task than the larger group. At times, small groups worked on a different assignment. Some students also receive pull-out support for literacy and math. Instruction is also differentiated through the school's "intervention" program (see the section on *At-Risk Students*).

### *Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)*

School leaders at AF Bushwick set high expectations for student achievement. The school's mission of "strengthening the academic...skills needed for all students to excel in top tier colleges" is evident throughout the school. College banners and inspirational messages adorn each room and the hallways, providing a visual reminder to the students of the school's mission. In interviews, school leaders and teachers articulated a clear vision for their students' achievement, namely for them to develop the skills they need to be prepared to succeed in college. They also reported that there is a strong sense of urgency in the school and in the Achievement First network to continually improve teachers' skills in the classroom in order to accelerate student growth.

High expectations for student achievement are also reflected in the school's goals, grade level goals, and teachers' individual goals. The school's Accountability Plan and its expectations for student performance on interim assessments reflect high expectations; leaders and teachers also continually implement strategies to further improve student achievement (See *Use of Assessment Data*). Each grade level also establishes "Big Hairy Audacious Goals" for student performance at the beginning of the year. For example, the third grade's goals include 90 percent of the students earning 85 percent in math on the fifth interim assessment (IA5) and 85 percent earning 75 percent on English language arts IA5. Many of these goals are visually posted in the school so that all members of the community are aware of them. Further, as part of their professional growth plans, individual teachers set challenging goals for their own students' performance. One 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher's goal is for all of her students to read on grade level by the end of the year, an ambitious goal considering that the majority of her students currently read at the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade level.

Instructional leaders at AF Bushwick provide teachers with ongoing and systematic support, which is consistent with the findings of the second year evaluation report. The school has a coaching model in place that provides each teacher with grade level and individual coaching. The work of the coaches, called academic deans, centers on regular observation and feedback, analyzing data, developing curriculum, and planning instruction. The coaches facilitate the goal setting process at the beginning of the year with teams and individual teachers, which helps to guide their work throughout the year. Through weekly meetings with the grade level and individual teachers, coaches provide ongoing support that is tailored to the needs of each teacher. In interviews, teachers reported feeling supported by their coaches and described bi-weekly observations and feedback sessions.

Teachers across the school stated that they receive support from other members of their grade level team and through the Achievement First network.

Instructional leaders at the school conduct regular and useful evaluations. The evaluation process is guided by the school's professional growth plans (PGPs), which contain performance indicators related to student achievement, instruction, classroom culture, planning and data analysis, student and family relationships, personal organization, and core values. Twice a year, teachers assess their own performance and school leaders evaluate each teacher against the checklist. The form also provides space for teacher and supervisor comments and an action plan. School leaders then meet individually with each teacher to review and discuss the results. Document review of a small sampling of professional growth plans revealed them to be thoroughly completed and focused on teachers' continued improvement. Several teachers reported that the feedback contained in their PGPs was helpful and thoughtful.

Instructional leaders at AF Bushwick also monitor and evaluate the academic program. Principals and academic deans for both the elementary and middle grades are clearly focused on academic achievement. When student results are not strong, school leaders take action. When middle school students scored lower than expected on the 2008 English language arts state assessment, the school responded by making curricular and instructional changes such as "Reading Mania," an intentional focus on increasing students' reading skills. In response to low scores on the 5<sup>th</sup> grade math interim assessment, the classroom teacher was replaced by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher/academic dean. The principal of the elementary school reported that the school has a "laser-like focus on ELA" this year and has changed its guided reading program to incorporate more reading comprehension. She described this change as prompted by the discovery, through test results and observation, that students' understanding of text was weaker than their fluency. During the 2008-09 school year, the school has created time in the schedule each day for reading comprehension.

#### *At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)*

AF Bushwick provides sufficient resources to meet a range of student needs and has a number of interventions in place. Within classrooms throughout the school, instruction is differentiated through small flexible groupings (As noted above in *Pedagogy*). Outside the classroom, the school has numerous supports for students. The school provides time in the schedule called "intervention," during which students are grouped according to the mathematics and English language arts skills they have not mastered. Grade level "data-driven plans" reviewed by inspectors were thorough and, for each grouping of students, included specific standards and skills to be taught, the strategy behind teaching the skills, and the assessment to be used to determine mastery. The intervention groupings are determined every six weeks based on interim assessment results. A Linguistics program serves both students with disabilities and students who are struggling academically in the middle school grades. This program provides small group instruction in a pull-out model and is differentiated to meet individual student needs. Further, teachers in all grades reported working with struggling students during breakfast, lunch and after school. Finally, the school offers a Saturday Academy for struggling students. In interviews, teachers and coaches cited specific evidence and examples of the performance of at risk students improving based upon these targeted interventions.

The school currently serves about 50 students with disabilities and has two special education coordinators/teachers and one learning specialist on staff. Special education teachers provide Special Education Teacher Support Services (S.E.T.T.S) to students in a pull-out model. The school also provides collaborative team teaching within the classroom at some grade levels. There are

opportunities for regular communication between special education teachers and classroom teachers for most grade levels.

Procedures are in place for identifying students with special needs at the school, including those who should be evaluated by a Committee on Special Education for possible special education programs and/or services. School leaders described a Child Study Team that meets every six weeks. The teams include the respective elementary or middle school grades principal, special education coordinator, and social worker, and they meet to discuss teacher referrals and to monitor students and the evaluation process. Teachers across the school were familiar with the Child Study Team and the referral process.

Teachers are provided with training to help them meet a range of student needs. Academic deans provide individualized training and support to teachers (see *Instructional Leadership*), and special education teachers work regularly with specific grade level teams. In interviews, special education teachers described providing teachers with instructional strategies for students with disabilities as well as at-risk students at grade level meetings and through ongoing communication via email and after school.

#### *Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)*

AF Bushwick is safe and orderly. On the day of the visit, students throughout the school were generally well-behaved and focused on learning. In observed classrooms, students were calm and transitioned efficiently from one learning activity to the next. Further, the school has created a culture where learning is valued, and this was evident to inspectors in both previous visits. Inspectors observed a consistent tone of respect for learning throughout the school, as well as visual and verbal reminders of the school's mission for all students to graduate from college. Students are referred to as "scholars" by all adults and are frequently encouraged to make positive behavioral choices to maximize their learning.

AF Bushwick has a dean of students at both the elementary and middle school level who focus on student culture and discipline. The elementary dean of students described working with the principal to provide professional development to teachers at the beginning of the year and on an ongoing basis to support them in teaching the REACH values (Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship, and Hard work). He also reported circulating in classrooms frequently to help support students and teachers in maintaining a focused environment. In the middle school grades, the dean of students and social worker work closely together on school culture and discipline. The school also has an advisory program with a character-focused curriculum to support the teaching of REACH values, as well as a culture committee that includes the middle school principal, dean of students, special education coordinator and social worker.

AF Bushwick has discipline systems in place that are consistently applied. In the elementary grades, teachers were observed using a pin system in the classroom in which students move up or down the levels based on their behavior. A behavior log is sent home each night, and the dean of students reported that a pattern of misbehavior leads to a phone call home or a family meeting. In the middle school grades, the system is based on students earning or losing "scholar dollars." Students' credits and deductions are totaled on a "paycheck," which is sent home weekly. Teachers were observed using the scholar dollar system as well as a common hierarchical consequence system. In interviews, teachers reported being expected to use verbal warnings, a reflection seat, and timeouts in a buddy teacher's classroom before students are sent to the dean. The dean of students described a process in

place for detentions, phone calls, and suspension and reported that students who continually struggle with behavior may be provided with a behavior intervention plan. In the middle school grades shirt colors are used to identify students who are not in compliance with the school's culture. Document review by inspectors indicated that there is a clear check-list for regaining a blue shirt, and the school introduced a light blue shirt to demonstrate progress from white shirt to blue shirt.

### *Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)*

AF Bushwick has a sustained, comprehensive professional development program with components tailored to individual teachers' needs. Similar to the professional development program described in the second year report, teachers receive extensive training in the summer, participate in regular professional development sessions at the school, and attend Achievement First trainings focused on content and pedagogy. According to teachers and leaders, the summer training session is two weeks long, with the first week led by Achievement First and centered on network-wide expectations and systems, instructional planning, and school culture. The second week is led by the school's principals and focuses on topics relevant to AF Bushwick.

School leaders reported that weekly team meetings at the school often provide teachers with professional development opportunities. Document review of the 2008-2009 Team Meeting Plan for the elementary grades showed that the school provides sessions on topics such as school culture, data analysis ("data days"), and guided reading. Principals reported that these topics are generated based on data from coaches and from a survey of teachers.

Teachers across the school reported attending professional development sessions offered by Achievement First, during which they had the option to choose workshops on a variety of topics. Teachers also described participating in regular meetings with all Achievement First teachers in New York City to discuss specific content areas. Finally, the coaching model at the school (see *Instructional Leadership*) allows each teacher to participate in ongoing, embedded professional development that is individualized and directly tied to the classroom. This tailored professional development addresses the desire for more individualized support expressed by teachers during the school's first year. However, a small number of middle school teachers, particularly those who are the only teacher of their subject matter in the school, expressed the need for coaches with more classroom and content area experience.

Both principals described monitoring the coaches and providing them with feedback on the support they offer teachers. The principal of the elementary school reported conducting co-observations with coaches and modeling giving feedback to teachers. The coaches described feeling effectively supported by the principal as well as by trainings for academic deans provided by Achievement First. Each principal is coached and supervised by a superintendent of Achievement First. In interviews, both principals and both superintendents described intensive and consistent collaboration including weekly meetings, regular co-observations, and goal-setting.

### *Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)*

AF Bushwick has remained faithful to its mission. All stakeholders at the school, including teachers, school leaders, and board members, were familiar with and expressed commitment to the school's mission of high academic achievement for all students. Further, the school has fully implemented the key design elements included in its charter.

The school has also met the non-academic goals outlined in its Accountability Plan. As reported in its 2007-08 Accountability Plan Progress Report, AF Bushwick met its goals regarding parent satisfaction, student attrition, and attendance. On the year-end survey administered to families, 93 percent gave the school an “A” or higher, exceeding the school’s goal of 80 percent rating the school a “B.” Student attrition at the school was 3 percent during the 2007-08 school year, which is a lower than the 5 percent goal established in its Accountability Plan. Student attendance for the 2007-08 school year was 97 percent, exceeding the school’s goal of 95 percent.

#### *Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)*

Consistent with the findings of the second year evaluation report, parents and guardians of students at AF Bushwick are satisfied with the school. As described above, the school administers an annual year-end survey to families. The school reported a response rate of 84 percent for the 2007-2008 survey, and the results of the survey were very positive. The school’s 3 percent attrition and 97 percent attendance rates during the 2007-08 school year are further evidence of parent satisfaction. According to the board of trustees, no formal grievances from parents have been brought to the board this year.

At the time of the Institute’s site visit, school leaders in the middle school grades reported an active parent leadership council. The principal of the middle school grades also stated that she had recently administered a student survey and that students reported strong, positive attitudes about the school’s book clubs and independent reading programs.

#### *Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)*

The day-to-day operations of AF Bushwick are effectively managed. The school has a director of operations who divides her time between the two buildings, and each site has a school manager. The director of operations reported that her team is responsible for student services, such as bussing and food services; enrollment documentation; finances; human resources; city, state, and federal compliance; generating and distributing report cards; and all other logistical aspects of the school. The director of operations described meeting weekly with each principal to address short and long term logistical issues. The school-based operations people are supported by “Team Operations” at Achievement First.

Facility issues have been a challenge for AF Bushwick during its first three years and were noted in previous inspection reports; however, the school now appears to have secured facilities that will be adequate through its final growth stages and when it is fully enrolled. For the 2009-10 school year, the middle school grades, now located in Bushwick, will remain where they are, and the elementary grades will move to a location within walking distance. School leaders and the board of trustees reported satisfaction with the sites being located close to each other in the community of Bushwick. In anticipation of being fully enrolled and serving grades K-8 in 2010, the two principals reported plans for closer collaboration. Tentative plans currently include the principals doing co-observations in each other’s classrooms and developing cross-age reading groups next year.

The organizational structure of the school provides distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The elementary and middle school programs each have a principal to whom all others report. Each principal has a leadership team, consisting of academic deans, deans of students, the director of operations and a special education coordinator. Teachers reported knowing who to go to for different types of support. In addition to the school based reporting lines,

some positions also report to their counterparts at the Achievement First network. For example, the director of operations, special education coordinator and principals report to and receive support from specific individuals or “teams” at Achievement First. In interviews, school-based personnel indicated that the two lines of reporting did not cause confusion or challenges.

AF Bushwick’s elementary program has effectively retained teachers over its three years, while the school has struggled to hire and retain high quality personnel in the middle school grades. Two-thirds of the elementary teachers and leaders have been at the school for at least two years, providing some stability and experience. Few staff in the middle school grades, however, have been at the school for more than one year. While the Institute recognizes that the middle school program is only in its second year, the staffing challenges it has experienced are notable. Some teachers were not asked to return for the school’s second year; a special education teacher was hired after the start of the current school year; one teacher’s load was taken over by an academic dean during the current year; and a teacher and the dean of students resigned after the school year started. The school was fortunate to have two leadership residents in place who could take on these responsibilities. According to the minutes of the November 2008 board meeting, “concrete staffing challenges created a hectic atmosphere with which to start the year. It was challenging to develop a sense of normalcy for students and staff [in the middle school grades].” The middle school principal, the board, and representatives from the Achievement First network indicated that they are aware of these staffing challenges and are prioritizing staff recruitment for the middle school grades for the 2009-10 school year.

AF Bushwick has maintained adequate enrollment and a sufficient waitlist each year. According to data presented at the March 2009 board meeting, the school currently enrolls 507 students. Of note, 20 students have left the school between the start of the 2008-09 school year and the end of February. The majority of departures are from students in the middle school grades, and this number is higher than the previous school year. School leaders and the board are aware of this issue, and a review of board meeting minutes indicates that it is being monitored. Student recruitment is primarily led by “Team External Relations” at the Achievement First network. Once students are admitted in the lottery, the school’s director of operations manages the enrollment process. As of February 2009, the school had a waitlist of over 700 students.

#### *Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)*

The board of trustees of AF Bushwick has worked to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the school’s educational program. The board understands that student achievement is the core business of the school and regularly reviews and discusses student performance data. The board consists of ten members, including two parent representatives and one Achievement First network representative. Two members joined the board during the current academic year, one of whom is the representative from Achievement First who replaced the previous representative. In an interview with school inspectors, board members described the board as having diverse skill sets including finance, law, education, facility, and community organizing.

The board meets five times during the school year and also participates in a one-day retreat led by the Achievement First network each summer. The first meeting of each academic year consists of a network-wide presentation to all schools affiliated with Achievement First facilitated by Achievement First, Inc. and is followed throughout the remainder of the year by break-out sessions for each school. Based on a review of minutes of board meetings from January 2008 through March 2009, it is evident that the board regularly receives sufficient information from school leaders and the charter management

organization (“CMO”) with which to hold them accountable and that the board is focused on student achievement and the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals. The Achievement First presentations include student performance results across the network and issues related to the broader education context, such as mayoral control and funding. During the Achievement First Bushwick board meetings, the treasurer presents the school’s financials, which Achievement First prepares and discusses with the treasurer prior to the meeting. Then, each principal presents a dashboard of indicators that includes enrollment and waitlist data, student and teacher attendance, and demographic information. Student performance results on interim assessments and state tests, homework completion, and other academic data are regularly reviewed and discussed. Other topics, such as facility and the charter management agreement, are discussed as appropriate. This evidence of regular written reports from school leadership and Achievement First on academic performance, financial stability and organizational capacity is consistent with the school’s first year letter and appears to address questions raised in this regard in the second year evaluation report.

During the site visit, board members reported that their role is not to micromanage but rather to work closely with the management company, to support the principals, to represent and be accountable to the community, and to be “advocates for the work we’re engaged in.” Board members reported that they actively monitor the school, ask difficult questions, and ensure that the school’s goals are met. They offered their discussions of the lower than expected 5<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts scores on the 2008 New York State Testing Program as an example of this approach.

As found in both previous evaluation visits, the board does not directly evaluate the school leaders. However, a formal evaluation process for the school leaders is in place in which each principal is evaluated by a superintendent from Achievement First. In interviews, both principals and superintendents described a close working relationship focused primarily on instructional leadership. Each principal has regular opportunities for communication and collaboration with their supervisor through weekly meetings, multiple co-observation days, and individual goal setting. There are clear metrics for the principals’ evaluations, including academic performance and school culture, and the results of the mid- and end-year evaluations are shared with the board chair. According to both superintendents, there is not currently a formal process for communicating these evaluation results to the board, but they plan to develop a process for doing so.

When asked by school inspectors, board members described a positive relationship with their management company, Achievement First. One board member stated that they “believe in the CMO model, but are loyal to AF Bushwick,” and feel they are leveraging critical infrastructure from the CMO to support the school. The board chair reported that there is strong communication between the board and Achievement First as well as between school-based personnel and Achievement First. She also stated that Achievement First is very responsive to questions and is transparent in their work together. The board has discussed Achievement First’s growth plan and is comfortable with its pace, based on the organization’s track record of student performance and its extensive relationships with key leaders in the city, and views its rapid growth as necessary given the current political context.

The board has recently approved a process to formally evaluate the school, the charter management organization, and itself. Adopted in November 2008, the “Board Evaluation Document” was designed by a committee of representatives from each of the Achievement First boards of trustees and is intended for use at all Achievement First schools. Criteria include academic and organization goals for the school; curricular, staffing, training, facility, and financial goals for Achievement First; and attendance, giving, and school participation goals for the board. Given its recent adoption, the evaluation process

will be fully implemented in the 2009-10 school year. The adoption of this process is intended to remedy the issue of the board not conducting an evaluation of Achievement First as identified in previous evaluation reports.

After a lengthy process, the board approved a final charter management agreement in March 2009. According to board members, the extensive process was due to finalizing the language in the indemnification provision of the agreement and their desire to ensure that the school could stand alone if needed.

### **Conduct of the Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Third Year Inspection Visit at AF Bushwick on April 30, 2009. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

**Adam Aberman (External Consultant)** is Youth Venture's Director of Global Online Strategy. Prior to this role, Mr. Aberman was the Executive Director and Founder (and currently Board Member) of [icouldbe.org](http://icouldbe.org), the non-profit Internet-based career mentoring program that has served over 5,000 teens nationwide and in Tanzania. Mr. Aberman is also the Principal and Founder of The Learning Collective, a consulting organization that strengthens practices of youth-serving organizations. Prior to establishing [icouldbe.org](http://icouldbe.org), Mr. Aberman was a Regional Coordinator for the New York City Department of Education. He began his career in education as a Spanish bilingual public school teacher in Los Angeles. Mr. Aberman received a B.A. from Vassar College and a Master's in Public Policy, with an emphasis on Education, from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

**Yuet Chu (External Consultant)** served as Empowerment Network Leader for the majority of schools in this network in 2007-08. Prior to that, Ms. Chu was an Achievement Coach for a diverse group of elementary and middle schools in the Empowerment organization. From 2003 - 06, Ms. Chu was the Middle School Director at the School of the Future in District 2. From 1995 to 2003, she taught Math, Physical Science and Special Education and served as Assistant Principal at School of the Future. Prior work experience includes marketing, project management and investment research and sales in an investment management firm.

**Kevin Flynn** is an Accountability Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He is responsible for providing technical support related to school accountability plans, as well as the reporting and analysis of individual school performance. Prior to joining the Institute in November 2008, Mr. Flynn served as the Chair of the Science Department at KIPP 3D Academy Charter School in Houston, TX, where he authored curriculum, instructed 7th and 8th grade students, coached peers, and managed the Saturday School program. Prior to his service at KIPP 3D Academy, Mr. Flynn served as a science teacher via Teach For America at the John Marshall Middle School, also in Houston. A recipient of the school's Excellence in Teaching Award, his responsibilities included curriculum development and instruction for at-risk students as well as English Language Learners. Mr. Flynn received his Master's degree in Education, with a concentration in Policy, Organization and Leadership Studies, from Stanford University and his Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from Cornell University.

**Piel Hollingsworth (External Consultant and Team Leader)** is an education consultant based in the Boston area. Currently, she is focusing primarily on school evaluation as well as national and state level dissemination of best practices in urban education. She began her career in education 18

years ago in rural Louisiana with Teach for America and has spent nine years in the classroom and eight years in school leadership. She has taught in a number of public schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In 1999, Ms. Hollingsworth joined Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter Public School and in her nine years there, she served as a teacher, the principal, and co-director. Ms. Hollingsworth received her M.A.T from Union College and a B.A. in history from Hamilton College.

**Sue Seymour** is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. In the past, Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999, she worked in the Governor’s Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting “red tape” from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

**Simeon Stolzberg** is Director of School Evaluation at the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He is responsible for the coordination of school evaluation visits by Institute staff and external consultants, the development of reporting tools/protocols and the production of reports, and he also coordinates internal staff training with regard to school evaluation visits and reporting tools. Prior to joining the Institute, Mr. Stolzberg managed his own consulting practice, advising charter schools across the country in their application and planning phases. He also served as Middle School Director for the Beginning with Children Charter School in Brooklyn, New York. In 2002, as a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, Mr. Stolzberg wrote the prospectus and application for the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BArT) in Massachusetts; the school was one of only five schools approved by the state that year. Mr. Stolzberg served as the school’s founding principal. Mr. Stolzberg received his Master’s Degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, with independent studies in education and political economy, from Williams College.

## APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

*An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.*

*Visit the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc> to see the complete listing of Benchmarks.*

Benchmarks 1B – 1H, and Benchmarks 2A – 2E were using in conducting this evaluation visit.

| <b>Renewal Question 1<br/>Is the School an Academic Success?</b>                                     |  |
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| <b><u>Evidence Category</u></b>  | <b><u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u></b>  |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1B</b></p> <p><b>Use of<br/>Assessment Data</b></p> | <p><b>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school’s curriculum framework and state performance standards;</li> <li>• the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board;</li> <li>• the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy;</li> <li>• the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved;</li> <li>• the school’s leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school’s academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services;</li> <li>• the school’s teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students;</li> <li>• a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade;</li> <li>• the school regularly communicates each student’s progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and</li> <li>• the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1C</b></p> <p><b>Curriculum</b></p>                 | <p><b>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>• the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school’s curriculum framework,</li> </ul>   |

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|  | <p>identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade;</li> <li>teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans;</li> <li>teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school's curriculum;</li> <li>the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and</li> <li>the curriculum supports the school's stated mission.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1D</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogy</b></p>                     | <p><b>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach;</li> <li>instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson;</li> <li>lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators;</li> <li>instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school's student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments;</li> <li>all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time;</li> <li>learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and</li> <li>teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1E</b></p> <p><b>Instructional<br/>Leadership</b></p> | <p><b>The school has strong instructional leadership.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement;</li> <li>the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement);</li> <li>the school's instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness;</li> <li>the school's instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms;</li> <li>the school's leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas;</li> <li>the school's instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1F</b></p> <p><b>At-Risk Students</b></p>                   | <p>teachers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school’s leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and</li> <li>the school’s leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school’s academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.</li> </ul> <p><b>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs;</li> <li>all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students;</li> <li>the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures;</li> <li>all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students’ Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals;</li> <li>the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and</li> <li>the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1G</b></p> <p><b>Student Order &amp;<br/>Discipline</b></p> | <p><b>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied;</li> <li>classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident;</li> <li>low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and</li> <li>throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 1H</b></p> <p><b>Professional<br/>Development</b></p>       | <p><b>The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers’ pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program;</li> <li>the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <p>mission, curriculum, and instructional programs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests;</li> <li>• professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school’s Accountability Plan goals;</li> <li>• teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities;</li> <li>• the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers’ varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities;</li> <li>• the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and</li> <li>• the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Renewal Question 2</b><br><b>Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</b>                |   |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u>  | <u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>  |
| <p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2A</b></p> <p><b>Mission &amp; Key Design Elements</b></p> | <p><b>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stakeholders are aware of the mission;</li> <li>• the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and</li> <li>• the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2B</b></p> <p><b>Parents &amp; Students</b></p>            | <p><b>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school;</li> <li>• the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it;</li> <li>• few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school;</li> <li>• a large number of parents seek entrance to the school;</li> <li>• parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and</li> <li>• the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Organizational Capacity</b></p>           | <p><b>The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations;</li> <li>• staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school’s mission;</li> <li>• the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving</li> </ul>   |

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|   | <p>its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals;</li> <li>• the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined;</li> <li>• the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability;</li> <li>• the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted;</li> <li>• the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and</li> <li>• the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 2D</b></p> <p><b>Board Oversight</b></p> | <p><b>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school;</li> <li>• the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight;</li> <li>• the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders;</li> <li>• the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity;</li> <li>• the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance;</li> <li>• where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion;</li> <li>• the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and</li> <li>• the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities for further governance training and development.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>State University<br/>Renewal<br/>Benchmark 2E</b></p> <p><b>Governance</b></p>      | <p><b>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</b></p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities;</li> </ul>   |

- the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity;
- the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter;
- the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner;
- the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints;
- the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies;
- the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and
- the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

## **APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Charter Schools and the State University of New York**

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts, schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case, the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees, which is directly responsible for school performance. While independent, public charter schools and their boards, like traditional public schools and school boards, are subject to oversight and monitoring. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its Accountability Plan as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness within the charter period, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

### **The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits**

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of

years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be in its fifth year of instruction and facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and report, which all schools in that position receive. As such, each of the Institute’s evaluation reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program, but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit (“the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks”). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1.B—1.H) to review the effectiveness of a charter school’s academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school’s internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school’s curriculum. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), the focus on these academic benchmarks is important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students’ performance on standardized tests (especially the state’s 3<sup>rd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing, but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.<sup>6</sup>

Over time, and particularly at the time of the school’s initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1A, the school’s progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the academic benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

### **Keeping This Report in Context**

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State

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<sup>6</sup> More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

University Trustees and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are valid, in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school's academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the evaluation team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the evaluation team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed *brutal honesty* is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.