



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Renewal Report

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning

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Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, New York 12207
518/433-8277
518/427-6510 (fax)
www.newyorkcharters.org

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The final version of Institute renewal reports should be broadly shared by the school with the entire school community. This report will be posted on the Institute’s website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/pubsReportsRenewals.htm.

REPORT INTRODUCTION

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) transmits to the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”) its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s Application for Renewal, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).¹

Information about the State University’s renewal process, as well as an overview of the requirements for renewal under the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended, the “Act”), are available in the [Appendix](#) of this report. Note too that the Institute’s website provides additional details and resources regarding renewal, including: the Institute’s comprehensive *Charter Renewal Handbook*, at: www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.

RECOMMENDATION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation

Full-Term Renewal

The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Trustees approve the Application for Renewal of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning and renew the charter for a period of five years with authority to provide instruction to students in kindergarten through 5th grade with a maximum projected enrollment of 342 students, and consistent with the other terms set forth in its Application for Renewal.

Required Findings

Based on all the evidence submitted in the current charter term and as described in or submitted with the Application for Renewal, the Institute makes the following findings required by the Act. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning as described in the renewal application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations. The school has demonstrated the ability to operate in an educationally and fiscally sound manner in the next charter period. Finally, given the programs it will offer, its structure and its purpose, approving the school to operate for another five years is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes set out in Education Law subdivision 2850(2).

Consideration of School District Comments

In accordance with the Act, the Institute notified the school district in which the charter school is located regarding the school’s Application for Renewal. No comments were received in response.

¹ The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm>.

Summary Discussion

Academic Success

Over its initial charter term, the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has become a strong school distinguished by a commonly-shared set of beliefs about teaching and learning. At the time of renewal, the school demonstrated particular strengths in the areas of student achievement, instructional leadership and professional development. The sustained involvement of a founding school leader, key instructional leaders, and several staff as well as the majority of the board of trustees has been a key factor in the success of the school. In addition, very strong parental support and partnerships with the local community have served an important role in the ongoing development of the school program.

During the initial charter period, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has come close to meeting the key academic goals stated in its Accountability Plan. The school has had consistently strong results on the New York State mathematics assessment, outperforming its local school district and comparable public schools state-wide. In the case of the New York State English language arts assessment, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has come close to meeting its goal and again outperformed its local school district and comparable public schools state-wide. In addition, by the end of the 2006-07 school year, students generally scored above grade level in English language arts and mathematics on the TerraNova test. As noted in its renewal application, the school had less success in 2006-07 in enabling students to make progress in the 4th grade compared to earlier grades. The school, which administered the New York State science assessment for the first time in 2006-07, met its science goal. The school is also deemed in “Good Standing” under New York State’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has been faithful to its mission and successfully implemented all key design elements over the term of the initial charter period. The school’s mission of attaining high academic achievement, predicated on the staff knowing the academic, social and emotional needs of each student and adjusting teaching to accommodate those needs, has been a strong focus of the work in the school during the first charter term. The instructional program is firmly centered in the belief that all children possess the capacity to learn and can be successful in a school setting dedicated to supporting learners at all stages of development.

The pedagogy at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning is based on general tenets informed by the teachings of Caleb Gattegno known as the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*. These tenets include the following:

- students are mentally energized;
- rather than being told what to know, students are encouraged to experience and come to understand concepts through action and reflection;
- student errors are welcomed as information that guides instruction;
- students’ knowledge and skills are tapped to master new content; and
- students become more independent, autonomous and responsible.

These common expectations have provided the school’s instructional leaders with a consistent framework through which to lead the school, and in particular, through which to model and coach the teaching of English language arts and mathematics.

Two key design elements in Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s charter highlight the importance of teacher professional development to “create a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members,” and providing “extensive opportunities for intensive staff development” to provide teachers “tools to make it work.” Throughout the term of its initial charter, the school has allocated substantial resources (time, staff and funds) to fully develop these professional development design elements, and have successfully fostered a highly collaborative and instructionally focused working environment for teachers. There was strong evidence that teachers at Bronx Charter School for Better Learning are committed to reflecting upon and striving to improve their instructional practice. Teachers have opportunities to collectively discuss and reflect upon their teaching and student learning on a daily basis.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has greatly benefited from the instructional leadership of a strong executive director who oversees and works with the school’s two highly experienced professional development specialists. These three very competent instructional leaders collectively work from general tenets of the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*. The instructional leadership team devotes the majority of its time to working with teachers and students in classroom settings daily. Renewal team members observed leaders drawing from and using their substantial content expertise in a variety of settings, including team meetings with teachers, classrooms where leaders modeled lessons, and classrooms where leaders observed and coached teachers. These frequent and instructionally-focused interactions foster a highly collaborative environment among school staff. Additionally, instructional leaders were extremely reflective about the quality of the professional development opportunities offered to teachers.

During its initial charter period, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning devoted considerable resources to fostering the Gattegno teaching approach as a way to assess and support students’ deep understanding of knowledge. School leaders are beginning to expand their focus on the craft of teaching to include a broader definition of assessment which includes both formal (“step back”) and informal (“up-close”) assessments.

Overall, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s instructional environment and culture promotes a high quality learning community. The instructional environment (physical plant) is inviting as it is clean, bright, and well-equipped. Staff members not only modeled respect for the school environment and facility, they also emphasized student responsibility for the appearance of the school and classrooms. The inviting and orderly instructional environment provided the school a firm foundation upon which to promote a culture of learning.

Over the course of its initial charter period and as the school grew in numbers of students and staff, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning adapted a variety of approaches to support the positive instructional environment including the recent adoption of the basic tenets of a school-wide behavior management program entitled, Responsive Classroom. Teachers and school leaders evidenced valuing of each child and his/her unique learning style. There was a general sense of well-being and safety in the school.

While areas of challenge remain, including supporting teachers in developing general pedagogical skills, better incorporation of existing assessment systems into the Gattegno approach, and further developing the school’s written curriculum documents, the school has sufficient strengths and resources to address these weaknesses and to raise the rigor of the existing academic program.

Organizational Effectiveness and Viability

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has demonstrated a high degree of faithfulness to its charter. Parents and students have indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school as measured by the school's daily attendance rate, student retention, a substantial wait list for admissions, and family surveys that reflect strongly positive attitudes about the school.

Over the term of the charter, the board of trustees has been highly stable (seven of 13 were founding trustees), with members carrying out their responsibilities with dedication. The board has identified and addressed organizational needs such as adjusting and expanding the leadership structure of the school and ensuring funding and support for the school's professional development programs.

With certain, minor exceptions, the school appeared to be in general and substantial compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the terms of its charter at the time of the renewal visit inspection and during the term of its charter. The school has implemented effective policies and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable law, serve the needs of parents and students and provide internal control guidance.

Fiscal Soundness

The school is in strong financial condition and has been stable throughout its existence. The school's overall fiscal strength has been aided by its shared use agreement with the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), whereby the school receives space for \$1 per year. The school has no long-term debt and throughout its renewal charter period has generated adequate cash flow to support operations. In addition, the school has demonstrated some capacity for fundraising with net income from private contributions and events totaling more than \$100,000 in the last two years. The school has never been cited for any material financial or internal control weaknesses as part of its annual audits. The school exhibits a commendable "tone at the top" that promotes a commitment to integrity and ethical values. The school's record of financial reporting has been exemplary. Each required report has been submitted on-time and has been complete and accurate.

The school has successfully operated in a fiscally sound manner and is highly likely to continue to do so assuming continued access to a NYCDOE facility. The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period. In addition, based on its most recent student application round and waiting list, the school has demonstrated a sufficient level of enrollment demand (400 students on its wait list for admission) to meet the projected enrollment for the next charter period.

Plans for the Next Charter Period

The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan that is likely achievable. The school's strong financial condition, conservative budgeting and history of close financial monitoring provide its proposed fiscal plan with a strong foundation and improves its chances for success. The plan projects an operating surplus and cash flow surpluses in each year.

To the extent that Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has achieved its key academic goals, continues to implement an educational program that supports achieving those goals, operates an effective and viable organization, and is fiscally sound, its plans to continue to implement the educational program as currently constituted during the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application for Bronx Charter School for Better Learning on February 23, 2003; it was subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on March 25, 2003. The school opened in the fall of 2003 with an enrollment of 50 students in 1st grade, added one grade each year thereafter, and enrolled 285 students in 1st through 5th grade in the fall of 2007, the final year of its original charter term.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning was originally located at a facility leased from the Bronx Bethany Church of the Nazarene at 971 East 227th Street in the Bronx. Following the school's first year of operation, a shared space agreement was reached with the New York City Department of Education in which Bronx Charter School for Better Learning was granted permission to locate the school in the annex portion of P.S. 11 (Seton Falls Elementary School) at 3740 Baychester Avenue in the Bronx. The school remains at this location.

The executive summary of the school's original charter application states that the school will seek to provide educational opportunities to children with few choices by demonstrating an "approach to education that can dramatically improve the school experience of virtually any child." That approach, the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*, was developed by Caleb Gattegno. The foundation of this pedagogy asserts that at-risk students have the same power to learn, but are less likely to tap that power in a typical school environment.

The school's mission statement is as follows:

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning provides its students with a solid foundation for academic success, through achievement that exceeds citywide averages and meets or exceeds New York State standards and national norms in all curriculum areas tested, especially in mathematics and language arts. Our teaching constantly adjusts to the needs of our students, leading to independence, autonomy, responsibility and a sustained love of learning, all of which contribute directly to high academic achievement.

Key design elements as outlined in the school's original charter application include the following:

- educational focus on the approach called *The Subordination of Teaching to Learning*;
- a scientifically-based, proven approach to instruction with heavy reliance on "Word in Color" for literacy instruction and Gattegno mathematics;
- serving at-risk students with the attitude that all children possess the powers of learning described by the Gattegno approach;
- creating a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members;
- the tools to make it work: extensive opportunities for intensive staff development; and
- measurable student achievement results through performance-based accountability, including an evaluation of student performance that is woven into the fabric of every lesson.

School Year (2007-08)

185 instructional days

School Day (2007-08)

7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.²

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2003-04	50	50	50	1	1	1	YES
2004-05	100	100	101	1-2	1-2	1-2	YES
2005-06	150	162	162	1-3	1-3	1-3	YES
2006-07	250	216	229	K-4	1-4	1-4	YES
2007-08	250	270	285	K-4	1-5	1-5	YES

² The normal instructional day includes a period from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. devoted to student breakfast and announcements.

	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
Race/Ethnicity	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11
American Indian or Alaska Native	0 %	1 %	0 %	1 %	NA	NA
Black or African American	72 %	47 %	94 %	48 %	NA	NA
Hispanic	9 %	39 %	5 %	39 %	NA	NA
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	19 %	5 %	1 %	5 %	NA	NA
White	0 %	8 %	0 %	7 %	NA	NA

Source: 2004-05, 2005-06: School Report Card (New York State Education Department); 2006-07: New York State Education Department Database.

	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
Special Populations	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11
Students with Disabilities	2 %	NA	2 %	NA	1.7 %	15.9 %
Limited English Proficient	0 %	8 %	0 %	9 %	0.0 %	9.5 %

Source: Students with Disabilities: Application for Renewal Statistical Overview (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07). Limited English Proficient: (2005-06) New York State Education Department School Report Card (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07).

Free/Reduced Lunch	2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11	% of Enroll. Bronx Better Learning	% of Enroll. Comm. District #11
Eligible for Free Lunch	52 %	55 %	59 %	70 %	48 %	68.2 %
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	24 %	8 %	20 %	9 %	29 %	10.0 %

Source: New York State Education Department School Report Card (2004-05, 2005-06); New York State Education Department Database (2006-07).

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
1 st Charter – 1st Year	2003-04	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter; End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
1 st Charter – 2 nd Year	2004-05	2 nd	YES	Evaluation Report	
1 st Charter – 3 rd Year	2005-06	3 rd	YES	Evaluation Report	Revision to charter granted on March 13, 2006 to modify grade range and enrollment limits for remainder of charter term
1 st Charter – 4 th Year	2006-07	4 th	NO	None	
1 st Charter – 5 th Year	2007-08	5 th	YES	Initial Renewal Report	Recommended for Full-Term, Five-Year Renewal

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	<p>1A.1 English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.4 Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p> <p>1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>

At the beginning of the charter period the school developed and adopted an Accountability Plan that set academic goals in the key subjects of English language arts and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. For each goal specific outcome measures define the level of performance necessary to meet that goal. These outcome measures include the following three types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) individual student growth based on year-to-year comparisons of grade level cohorts. The following table summarizes the outcome measures currently required by the Institute for each subject area goal, as well as a measure for NCLB. Schools may have also elected to include additional optional measures for these goals in their Accountability Plan.

Summary of Required Outcome Measures in Elementary/Middle School (K-8) Accountability Plans					
GOAL	Required Outcome Measures				
	Absolute		Comparative		Value Added
	75 percent proficient on state exam	Performance Index (PI) meets Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)	Percent proficient greater than local school district	School exceeds its predicted level of performance compared to similar public schools by a small Effect Size	Grade-level cohorts reduce by half the gap between the previous year's percent proficient and 75 percent
English language arts	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Mathematics	✦	✦	✦	✦	✦
Science	✦		✦		
Social Studies	✦		✦		
NCLB	The school is deemed in "Good Standing" under state's NCLB accountability system.				

The following data and discussion address the outcome measures for Bronx Better Learning Charter School under each of these five goals. As the basis for determining whether a school has met the goals, the results of the various required and optional outcome measures provide the framework for evaluating the school's academic success under this renewal benchmark. If the school's Accountability Plan did not include measures similar to those currently required by the Institute, outcomes related to those additional measures are presented as well. Bold numbers appearing in the tables are the critical values for determining if a measure was met in a given year.

English Language Arts

Accountability Plan Goal: *Students will become proficient readers and writers of the English Language.*

Accountability Plan Measures: The school has come close to meeting its English language arts goal. More than 60 percent of students were proficient on the state English language arts exam over the last two years when the school had grades in which New York State examinations were administered. In both of those years the school achieved the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state's NCLB accountability system and outperformed its local school district. In comparison to demographically similar schools statewide, in 2005-06, the school performed better than predicted (although just shy of achieving its target). However, last year it performed about the same as predicted and did not achieve its target for this measure. On its value-added measure, although students exceeded the national norm on the TerraNova exam, overall there were slight declines from year to year. Similarly on the state exam in 2006-07, the 4th grade cohort showed a decline in the percentage of students at the proficient level.

Absolute Measures				
Each year, 75 percent of 3 rd through 5 th graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State English language arts examination.				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=45)	2006-07 (N=93)
3	-	-	64.4	63.3
4	-	-	-	59.1
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	-	64.4	61.3
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State English language arts exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=53)	2006-07 (N=115)
PI	-	-	157	158
AMO	123	131	122	122

Comparative Measures				
Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State English language arts exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district.				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4)
School	-	-	64.4	61.3
District	-	-	56.8	52.1
Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State English language arts exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3) (N=53)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4) (N=115)
Predicted	-	-	59.4	64.1
Actual	-	-	64.2	63.2
Effect Size	-	-	0.25	-0.07

Value-Added Measures				
Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between their average NCE in the previous spring on the TerraNova, a nationally-normed reading test, and an NCE of 50 (i.e., grade-level) in the current spring. Starting in Grade 3, if a grade-level cohort exceeds an NCE of 50 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.				
Results (in percents)				
Mean NCE	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05 (Grade 2) (N=NA)	2005-06 (Grades 2-3) (N=91)	2006-07 (Grades 2-4) (N=147)
Baseline	-	58.2	54.1	49.5
Target	-	58.3	54.2	49.8
Actual	-	51.5	52.8	50.9
Cohorts Made Target	-	(0 of 1)	(1 of 2)	(2 of 3)
Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State English language arts exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State English language arts exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.				
Results (in percents)				
Percent Level 3 & 4 on NYSTP	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (Grade 4) (N=49)
Baseline	-	-	-	61.2
Target	-	-	-	68.1
Actual	-	-	-	55.1
Cohorts Made Target	-	-	-	(0 of 1)

Mathematics

Accountability Plan Goal: *Students will demonstrate mastery of grade level mathematical concepts.*

Accountability Plan Measures: The school has come close to meeting its mathematics goal. In both years in which the school had grades in which New York State examinations were administered, at least 80 percent of students scored at the proficient level on the state exam. The school consistently achieved the AMO and outperformed its local school district. In 2005-06 the school exceeded by a small degree its predicted performance in comparison to demographically similar schools. While it did better than predicted in 2006-07 as well, the margin was not large enough to achieve its target that year. On the TerraNova exam the school has overall shown gains in each of the last two years and performed slightly above the national norm; in 2006-07 all but one cohort achieved its target. Examining the value-added, based on the New York State Testing Program, the percentage proficient in the 4th grade cohort declined in 2006-07 but still remained above the absolute target of 75 percent.

Absolute Measures				
Each year, 75 percent of 3 rd through 5 th graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State mathematics examination.				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06³ (N=45)	2006-07 (N=92)
3	-	-	80.0	83.3
4	-	-	-	79.5
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	-
All	-	-	80.0	81.5
Each year, the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State mathematics exam will meet its Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=54)	2006-07 (N=114)
PI	-	-	180	177
AMO	136	142	86	86

Comparative Measures				
Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State Mathematics exam in each tested grade will be greater than that of the local school district.				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4)
School	-	-	80.0	81.5
District	-	-	76.4	77.0
Each year, the school will exceed its expected level of performance on the State Mathematics exam by at least a small Effect Size (performing higher than expected to small degree) according to a regression analysis controlling for students eligible for free lunch among all public schools in New York State.				
Results (in percents)				
Index	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 (Grade 3) (N=54)	2006-07 (Grades 3-4) (N=114)
Predicted	-	-	73.0	80.2
Actual	-	-	81.5	81.6
Effect Size	-	-	0.48	0.11

³ In 2005-06 New York State implemented English language arts and mathematics exams in 3rd through 8th grade. Prior to that, exams in these subjects were administered only in 4th and 8th grade.

Value-Added Measures				
Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between their average NCE in the previous spring on the TerraNova, a nationally-normed math test, and an NCE of 50 (i.e., grade-level) in the current spring. Starting in Grade 3, if a grade-level cohort exceeds an NCE of 50 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.				
Results (in percents)				
Mean NCE	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05 (Grade 2) (N=NA)	2005-06 (Grades 2-3) (N=54)	2006-07 (Grades 2-4) (N=147)
Baseline	-	54.9	49.5	46.9
Target	-	55.0	49.8	48.4
Actual	-	48.4	51.2	53.1
Cohorts Made	-	(0 of 1)	(1 of 2)	(2 of 3)
Target	-			
Each year, grade-level cohorts of students will reduce by one-half the gap between the percent at or above Level 3 on the previous year's State mathematics exam and 75 percent at or above Level 3 on the current year's State mathematics exam. If a grade-level cohort exceeds 75 percent at or above Level 3 in the previous year, the cohort is expected to show at least an increase in the current year.				
Results (in percents)				
Percent Level 3 & 4 on NYSTP	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (Grade 4) (N=50)
Baseline	-	-	-	81.6
Target	-	-	-	81.7
Actual	-	-	-	77.6
Cohorts Made	-	-	-	(0 of 1)
Target	-	-	-	

Science

Accountability Plan Goal: *Students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.*

Accountability Plan Measures: Based on limited data, the school met its science goal. 2006-07 was the first year in which the school administered the state science test; 75 percent of 4th grade students scored at the proficient level. Students who had been enrolled in the school longer performed better than their newer counterparts. Comparison data for the local school district are unavailable.

Absolute Measures				
Each year, 75 percent of fourth graders who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State science examination.				
Results (in percents)				
Grade	School Year			
	2003-04 (N=0)	2004-05 (N=0)	2005-06 (N=0)	2006-07 (N=57)
4	-	-	-	75.0
8	-	-	-	-

Comparative Measures				
Each year, the percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 on the State science exam will be greater than that of the local school district.				
Results (in percents)				
Comparison	School Year			
	2003-04 (Grades)	2004-05 (Grades)	2005-06 (Grades)	2006-07 (Grades)
School	-	-	-	75.0
District	-	-	-	NA

NCLB

In addition to meeting its specific subject area goals, the school is expected under No Child Left Behind to made adequate yearly progress towards enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state’s English language arts and mathematics exams. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues an annual school accountability report that indicates the school’s status each year.

Accountability Plan Measures: The school has achieved its NCLB goal by maintaining its status of “in good standing” according to the state’s NCLB accountability system.

Absolute Measures				
Under the state’s NCLB accountability system, the school’s Accountability Status will be “Good Standing” each year.				
Results (in percents)				
Status	School Year			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Good Standing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p>
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Over the initial charter period, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has devoted considerable resources to foster the Gattegno teaching approach as a way to assess and support students’ deep understanding of knowledge. According to the executive director, school leaders are beginning to expand their focus on the craft of teaching to include a broader definition of assessment which includes both formal (“step back”) and informal (“up-close”) assessments. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s challenge as it moves to its second charter term will be to further develop and incorporate these two forms of assessment into the existing Gattegno approach to instruction and assessment.

At the level of assessing individual students, renewal inspectors noted that most staff had a working knowledge of the Gattegno approach of leading a student through learning and demonstrating mastery of a concept or skill. Moreover, the school’s two professional development specialists systemically support this approach across grades through frequently conducting model lessons and facilitating weekly team discussions with teachers. In this approach, teachers pose a problem to a student that is appropriate to his or her skill and ability level. Teachers then use a variety of techniques to scaffold and assess students’ learning. For instance, inspectors observed one professional development specialist model this technique with a student. The child was to write the sentence, “My mother bought me a laptop.” When the child wrote “boot” for “bought,” the specialist had the child return to the “Words in Color” chart to verify the spelling of the word. Inspectors noted that other teachers who successfully used this approach also used other scaffolding techniques. For instance, teachers asked students who struggled with a prompt to verbally recall previous skills or knowledge related to the problem, or they helped the student mentally break the problem into several steps. Through this kind of student-teacher interaction, teachers were able to assess student’s individual performance while also developing students’ deeper understanding of a concept.

Teachers’ skills and knowledge in assessing the level of understanding of the class as a whole through forms of “up-close” assessments varied more widely across the school. Renewal team members observed some teachers “continuously monitor[ing] students’ learning so that the teachers could better adjust their instruction, in the moment, in response to the learning,” according to the school’s Application for Renewal. Strategies included engaging students in short verbal and written “quizzes,” using straw polls, running records, and touring the room seeking feedback from students. Teachers successfully utilizing these “close up” assessments used this information in making decisions about classroom instruction, such as deciding to move forward with the lesson or to modify and re-teach the lesson in some way to meet demonstrated student need.

As was noted in the school’s Second-Year Inspection Report, many teachers, however, were less effective in assessing and adjusting instruction to address the level of understanding of the class as a whole. Some teachers, for example, were satisfied and continued through their lessons when some students demonstrated the successful mastery of the skill being taught while others did not demonstrate successful mastery or were not engaged in the lesson. In some cases, it seemed that the teacher purposefully moved on through the lessons as part of the Gattegno approach. For example, when asked specifically about why he continued teaching a model lesson when some students could not perform a particular skill being taught, one of the school’s professional development specialists

stated, “We trust the kids. Sometimes they need to sleep on it. They may not be accurate today. They will get better on their own. They will practice and get better.” In most cases, however, it was less clear to observers if teachers who continued with their lessons purposefully used this approach or if teachers lacked the skills needed to change their pedagogical strategy based on “in the moment” assessments of students’ learning.

At the time of the renewal visit, school leaders had systematically collected and analyzed “step back” assessment data to identify academically challenged students and to create structures and processes to support those students. “Step back” data consisted of multiple measures, including student performance on state exams, TerraNova assessments in reading, language, and mathematics, Princeton Review assessments, and locally developed interim assessments. The school’s executive director said that the instructional leaders share these charts with teachers, who use this information to make decisions about student grouping and to make referrals to the Pupil Assistance Team (PAT). Interviews with teachers confirmed that “step back” data was used to group students in classrooms at the beginning of the year; for example, several students identified as needing more intensive academic support were grouped in classrooms assigned to two co-teachers. Identified students were also flagged to receive additional in-class support on specific concepts from basic skills teachers.

Currently one of the school’s professional development specialists assumes responsibility for analyzing and facilitating communications about accountability measures. To provide more resources and time for communications around accountability matters, the school has budgeted and planned for an additional supervisor of instruction and accountability position for the 2008-09 school year. The professional development specialist currently in charge of accountability said that the person in this new job position will assume full-time responsibility for collecting, analyzing and using “step back” data to inform organizational and instructional decision making at the school, including supporting teachers in using “step back” data to inform their instructional decision making and further developing the school’s curriculum to target areas of identified weakness.

As has been true throughout Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s charter term, teachers across the school used student portfolios to assess and monitor students’ progress towards acquiring skills and knowledge in relation to New York State standards. On a monthly basis, teachers placed selected student work and accompanying rubrics in individual student portfolios. Student work provided to inspection team members included student writing about English language arts topics and problem sets and student-written narratives about the logic of figuring out mathematics problems. Many writing prompts required students to use higher level thinking skills (e.g., write how you know you have created every possible structure of a 2-color, 4-cube tower, conduct an imaginary interview with a character from a story). Portfolio rubrics varied according to the assignment. All had a list of skills or competencies aligned with state performance standards, and had a numeric scale attached. At the end of the rubric, there was a place for teachers to write open ended comments. The school’s executive director stated that in addition to tracking individual student progress, student portfolios were important tools to encourage teachers to look carefully at and reflect upon samples of student work. Teachers and administrators also used portfolios to discuss students’ academic progress in parent-teacher meetings.

Benchmark 1C Curriculum	1C The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.
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The core curriculum of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning includes English language arts (reading, writing, and spelling), mathematics, science, and social studies. Students also receive instruction in art, music and physical education.

As noted throughout this report, from its inception, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has implemented a unique English language arts program that is based on the Gattegno method of reading, developed by the late Dr. Caleb Gattegno. Students are taught to read using a color-coded system that incorporates the use of “Words in Color” word charts and phonic code charts called Fidels. The curriculum contains lessons designed to develop students’ skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Sounds are first addressed without text, followed by reading and constructing phrases and sentences using the Fidels. Eventually, students read black and white text. The “Words in Color” method is used primarily in the lower grades (1st through 3rd grades). In the upper grades (3rd through 5th grades), the method is used less frequently. Several upper grade teachers stated that by the middle of third grade, students were ready to move on to using trade books and supplementary materials. As of the current school year, the 3rd through 5th graders are beginning to utilize the Nancy Atwell Writers Workshop for writing. Teachers and school leaders stated that this choice to use supplementary materials, like the Writers Workshop, had several purposes, including the need to prepare students for performing well on state assessments and to help students become familiar with the types of curricula that they would encounter in middle school. School leaders stressed the importance of providing teachers with the freedom to choose materials that helped them teach students skills needed to pass the New York State exams.

In the lower grades, the school utilizes Gattegno Mathematics which relies heavily on hands-on manipulatives like Cuisenaire rods. The expectation is that in solving puzzles and problems by using hands-on materials, students will gain an experiential understanding of mathematical concepts. In the 4th and 5th grades teachers utilized the Gattegno methods less and relied on supplementary materials. The teachers in 4th grade, for example, had adopted the Scott Foresman mathematics textbook for the 2007-08 school year (explained more fully below). Teachers in 5th grade reported using materials from a variety of sources, such as, textbooks they used in their student teaching programs. Teachers reported that they used supplementary materials to help prepare students for successfully passing standardized assessments.

The school’s instructional leaders discussed the importance of allowing teachers the freedom to choose and adapt materials for their classrooms. As one instructional leader noted, teachers have “the freedom to do what they want in their classrooms... They do other things, worksheets, stuff from a Master’s program. They have that freedom to get materials on their own from the outside.” In interviews, teachers said they appreciate having the opportunity to supplement school texts and curricular programs with outside materials. School leaders said that while teachers have the freedom to use alternative materials, they are also required to link their lesson plans to the New York State performance standards and core curriculum statements. Teachers across grade levels described “aligning” or indicating in their respective lesson plans how daily content and skills match the New York State performance standards and curricula, and a review of sample lesson plans confirmed this school-wide practice.

For science, the school had recently adopted the Science 21 program. The school's executive director noted that the types of activities and materials in this program are compatible with the Gattegno approach, and they are also aligned with the state standards. In social studies, the school uses the Nystrom history program. The executive director said this curriculum is not aligned with the Gattegno approach, and that in the future, the school would be considering alternative social studies programs with a greater focus on student-centered learning.

School leaders and teachers across the school expressed some conflict between the philosophy of the school to subordinate teaching to learning and the need to provide enough concrete examples and traditional curricula to help students be successful on standardized assessments. In general, teachers resolved this conflict on an ad-hoc basis. One teacher, for example, described incorporating more concrete mathematical examples to supplement the pedagogical practices that focus on color-coded rods and size relationships. The teacher stated, "At some point you have to say that they've played enough with the rods and we have to move on to a concrete example." In part to address this same conflict, the school's executive director said the 4th grade teachers adopted the Scott Foresman mathematics textbook.

The curriculum documents provided by the school were comprised of lesson topics that followed school textbook tables of contents and aligned skills, content, and key ideas in the twenty-eight New York State Learning Standards. Although inspection team members observed school staff discussing issues like performance indicators, assessments, and resources in team meetings—and teachers referenced these kinds of collaborative discussions in their interviews—the school has yet to codify these comprehensive elements of the curriculum. For example, in one team meeting, an inspection team member observed teachers and a professional development specialist discussing the importance of students being able to demonstrate a particular performance indicator related to mathematical values. The team discussed students' ability to conceptualize rods using different values (e.g., conceptualizing a problem with the small rod equaling one, and then re-conceptualizing the same problem with the small rod equaling 100). Teachers discussed not only ways to teach this concept, but also discussed differing ways they might assess students' understanding. The school has yet to capture this kind of performance indicator in its written curriculum.

Benchmark 1D	1D.1	The school has strong instructional leadership.
Pedagogy	1D.2	High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.
	1D.3	The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.

The leadership structure of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has evolved over the life of its charter to reflect and support the growing needs of the developing school. In the first years of the school’s charter, the school relied on lead teachers to provide instructional leadership while the principal was primarily responsible for the daily operations and management of the school. The leadership structure has changed over the initial charter term. The school has added several additional leadership positions, including an executive director, two professional development specialists, and a school psychologist. These school leaders, along with the principal who continues to be responsible for the operation of the school, meet frequently as a team to discuss and communicate about leadership issues and decisions. The school plans to continue to expand its leadership team to include a supervisor of instruction and accountability.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has greatly benefited from the instructional leadership of a strong executive director who oversees and works with the school’s two highly experienced professional development specialists. These three very competent instructional leaders collectively work from general tenets of the school’s pedagogy, collectively referred to as the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*, informed by the teachings of the late Dr. Caleb Gattegno. These common expectations have provided the instructional leaders with a consistent framework through which to model and coach the teaching of English language arts and mathematics. Gattegno methods provide students structured opportunities to learn concepts through encountering, experiencing, and reflecting rather than learning through being told what to know by teachers. Renewal team members observed leaders drawing from and using this content expertise in a variety of settings, including team meetings with teachers, classrooms where leaders modeled lessons, and classrooms where leaders observed and coached teachers. These frequent and instructionally-focused interactions foster a highly collaborative environment among school staff. The instructional leadership team devotes the majority of their daily time to work with teachers and students in classroom settings.

Teachers have opportunities to collectively discuss and reflect upon their teaching and student learning on a daily basis. Opportunities include grade level team meetings four times a week, at least one of which is attended by an instructional leader. As noted above, instructional leaders also model lessons and/or observe each classroom teacher at least once a week. In all of the teacher meetings attended by renewal team members, teachers’ reflective discussions consistently attended to “what happens in the classroom” (classroom episodes). For example, teachers were observed discussing instructional strategies related to using Cuisenaire rods and word wall charts, general questioning

techniques and appropriate use of wait time. Additionally, teachers' daily lesson plans contained some form of teacher reflection on pedagogy and student learning.

In addition to frequently observing and providing informal feedback to teachers, the school's executive director and, as of the 2007-08 school year, the principal, formally observe and evaluate teachers each school year. Evaluations are based on a rubric that the executive director developed last year. The executive director said that he designed the rubric to reflect general categories (e.g., relevance of activities, rapport with students, collaboration, reflection) that would be worthwhile to discuss with teachers. The executive director said that he viewed formal evaluations as a way to promote teacher reflection, "I hope what is happening is that we are getting teachers to look not just seriously but in a very refined way at the moments of their teaching. So much of it is about [promoting a positive] relationship with us [the leadership team]." Interviews with teachers and observations suggest that team meetings, observations, and other institutional structures have together enabled leaders to promote a culture of professional, reflective, and instructionally focused collaboration among teachers and school leaders. Overall, teachers expressed gratitude for and satisfaction with the reflective and collegial environment in which the school operates.

Both the executive director and the principal, whose responsibilities also include supervising and evaluating teaching assistants, stated that teaching assistants were in need of additional development and support in areas of student discipline and order. The executive director and principal said that although teaching assistants were not included in teacher professional development workshops, they planned to include them in future workshops to make the program more seamless within and across classrooms, hallways, and the playground.

Although the leadership team has a strong focus on developing teachers' content knowledge and skills in the Gattegno methods of teaching mathematics and English language arts, the team has yet to identify and to support teacher learning in general instructional strategies across content areas. This has been an issue throughout the term of the school's charter, and was noted in the Institute's Second-Year Evaluation Report: "While the school is committed to the Gattegno approach and is supported by the Gattegno Foundation, it appears that the school has some professional development needs beyond their scope. For example, teachers appear to need assistance in refining their classroom management techniques and in adapting the Gattegno method to a whole class setting." The executive director stated that the school has recently adopted the Responsive Classroom program to address this deficiency, and renewal team members observed aspects of this program utilized by teachers across the school. For example, teachers held morning meetings with students, asked students to help create classroom rules, and interacted with students about discipline issues in respectful ways. Inspectors noted that the Responsive Classroom practices they observed teachers using across the school contributed to respectful and orderly classroom environments

There was little evidence, however, that the Responsive Classroom program or any other of the many existing school structures sufficiently supported teachers in developing general pedagogical skills like proximity to students, eye contact, voice control, variation of instructional strategies to meet students' needs, or use of "close up" assessments to inform teaching decisions. One of the school's professional development specialists said that currently, teachers learned general pedagogical skills like pacing and momentum through trial and error. This statement, combined with classroom observations, suggests that the school has yet to adapt its well-developed teacher support and development structures to help teachers better refine and develop their general pedagogical skills.

It appears that the school's leadership has developed an effective recruiting and hiring process. Six teachers who were asked about being hired described a process that was timely, thorough, candid, and informative. Several teachers emphasized that the ongoing support and collegiality exhibited during the interview process were two of the factors that affected their final decisions.

As has been discussed in previous sections, there is ample evidence that teachers at Bronx Charter School for Better Learning are committed to reflecting upon and striving to improve their instructional practice. Despite this commitment, high quality instruction was not evident in all classrooms throughout the school. In particular, inspectors noted that within and across the school grades and classrooms, student engagement varied. In a quick survey of student engagement in classrooms across all grade levels, in only about half of the surveys conducted (11/20) were more than 80% of students engaged in the lesson.

Teachers who successfully engaged students in their lessons drew from a variety of pedagogical techniques including utilizing individual and whole class questioning techniques, addressing and redirecting disengaged students, and adjusting the focus and pacing of the lesson to attend to individual and whole class learning needs. In one reading lesson, for example, the teacher differentiated questions to engage almost every student. Additionally, the teacher modeled the learning outcome, facilitated peer modeling of the outcome, and provided incremental opportunities for struggling students to demonstrate competency. These techniques worked effectively to engage all students within the classroom and to address students' individual and collective learning needs.

In less successful classrooms, teachers did not effectively adjust instruction to meet students' learning needs. In some cases, teachers did not pace the lesson well. For example, on several occasions, teachers in the lower grades were observed proceeding through blocks of time in excess of 60 minutes without opportunities for students to move about the classroom. While observers noted that they saw this strategy work in some classrooms, in many cases, students had trouble maintaining focus and attention. In some cases, less successful classrooms appeared to be a function of teachers' lack of general instructional skills such as maintaining appropriate eye contact with the entire class, adjusting the lesson to meet students' needs, and effectively using classroom assistants. For example, throughout a lesson on the water cycle, one teacher had a great deal of difficulty keeping students on task. When a teaching strategy involved using individual student papers to illustrate the water cycle process did not work, the teacher did not have the skills or repertoire to readjust the lesson mid-stream.

In its Application for Renewal, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning noted previous problems with "student distractibility and preoccupation." The document states, "We recognize that active mental engagement is essential to high academic achievement and that any given student's readiness to provide such engagement in a classroom, at any given time, depends on a host of complex, often interacting factors." Evidence collected at the time of the renewal visit suggests that the school has yet to provide all teachers with the complex pedagogical skills needed to maintain students' focus and responsiveness throughout their lessons.

There were inconsistencies in the application of Gattegno mathematics and literacy methods. Teachers who were skilled in this area were able to challenge student thinking by asking probing questions while keeping other students involved in the instructional process. Those teachers with less teaching experience or who were new to the school often retreated to more traditional teacher directed approaches, limiting both student-to-student and intensive teacher-to-student interactions.

The traditional instruction appeared to provide teachers a way to monitor student behaviors and to maintain pace.

In order to address the instructional needs of all students, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has in place several structures where teachers, school leaders and staff can identify and support students in need of academic and social interventions. Inspectors observed a deliberate focus of all staff attending to students with special needs, regardless of whether those needs were academic, social or emotional. For example, instructional leaders use assessment data and input from teachers to make decisions about grouping students for classroom instruction. In some cases, cohorts of weak students have been placed together in classrooms in which two co-teachers, one veteran teacher and one beginning teacher, have been assigned. The school's Application for Renewal attributes the increase in TerraNova reading and mathematics scores of two cohorts of students in 2006-07 on the students' placement in rooms with co-teachers. During the renewal visit, however, observers noticed few specialized instructional strategies or protocols utilized in classrooms with co-teaching teams. However, it should be noted that these observations might be attributed to the renewal visit occurring in the first weeks of the 2007-08 school year, and to the fact that secondary teachers in the co-teaching teams were novice teachers and new to the school.

In addition to classroom groupings, individual students who are having academic or social problems in the school are referred by teachers to the Pupil Assistance Team (PAT) based on academic grades, test scores, and teacher referrals. The PAT team is chaired by the school psychologist, and is comprised of the student's teachers, the professional development specialists, and a student's parent or guardian. Upon referral, the team discusses the student's particular learning needs and the remediation strategies the school will employ to help the student. According to the school psychologist, there were 27 students under the supervision of PAT last year, including six students with special education needs. The school has no students identified as English Language Learners. Currently, the school relies on different variations of "pull out" strategies to help students in need of academic or social interventions. Special education students with disabilities who have acute academic or social needs that are beyond the capabilities of the school staff are referred to the community school district's Committee for Special Education (CSE). During the 2006-07 year, the school referred 12 cases to the CSE. In most cases, however, the school psychologist serves students with social or emotional needs through pulling them out of non-academic classes.

According to the executive director, the school has employed two basic skills teachers to provide extra in-class academic support to "any student who is struggling," including students identified through PAT. Basic skills teachers "push in" to classrooms to help provide extra support to students on in-class assignments and also "pull out" students to further develop specific academic skills.

In general, students with academic needs who have been referred to PAT receive extra support from the classroom teacher, professional development specialists, and basic skills teachers. Teachers across the school cited the PAT program and basic skills teachers as the interventions they utilized to support academically struggling students. The school's professional development specialists, both experts in Gattegno methods, meet weekly with the basic skills teachers where concerns about particular students can be discussed and addressed. The basic skills meeting that renewal team members attended provided a rich context where teachers and a professional development specialist discussed an individual student's particular learning difficulties and needs. The meeting included a model tutoring lesson with a student and a professional development specialist, followed by a thoughtful discussion focused on the model lesson and implications for practice. Prior to the close of

the meeting, the group identified an academically struggling student on whom to focus at the next meeting.

It was unclear to renewal team members the degree to which novice basic skills teachers had the skills and expertise needed to support students at risk of failing academically. The school's executive director shared this concern, but also framed this as an opportunity to provide new teachers with hands-on teacher training in a specialized and controlled environment. He said that using novice teachers as basic skills teachers for a year may serve as a proactive way to train teachers to be good classroom teachers in the ensuing years. He said that in settings with fewer students and with support from the school's professional development specialists, basic skills teachers could focus on honing their content knowledge and pedagogical skills related to the Gattegno method. However, due to the early timing of the renewal visit in the first year of this teacher training approach, the effectiveness of this model could not be determined.

Benchmark 1E	
Student Order & Discipline	1E The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.

Overall, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s instructional environment and culture reflect a high quality learning community. The instructional environment (physical plant) is inviting as it is clean, bright, and well-equipped. Staff members not only modeled respect for the school environment and facility, they also emphasized student responsibility for the appearance of the school and classrooms. This responsibility was accepted by the students. Students were generally mindful of the classroom protocols for such things as acquisition of materials, formation of groups and movement to student centers. When materials were needed, they were present in sufficient amounts for all students. The inviting and orderly instructional environment provided the school a firm foundation upon which to promote a culture of learning.

Over the term of its initial charter period, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning developed this positive instructional environment in response to the Institute’s Second- and Third-Year School Evaluation Reports in which teachers’ use of behavior management strategies was described as inconsistent. The school has successfully addressed this issue through adopting and adapting Responsive Classroom, a program that matches the school’s child-centered philosophy.

At the time of the renewal visit, the Responsive Classroom program seemed to provide a common language and consistent expectations about social interactions, rules, and behavior within the learning community. There was clear and consistent evidence in teacher interviews and in observations of classes, school-wide morning meetings facilitated by the principal, and in classroom morning meetings facilitated by teachers, that the Responsive Classroom was a viable and practiced approach. As a whole, teachers across the school held positive perceptions of the Responsive Classroom. They believed that the process for the selection and adaptation of the program was a school-wide process, and that the program is consistent with the philosophy of the school. Teachers and administrators both noted that since adopting the program, classroom and school-wide student behavior has improved. Teachers appreciated the quality of training they received, and reported having less anxiety with general behavior management. Teachers also said they felt better prepared to instruct students having acquired additional strategies that supported better organization of the learning space and teaching materials, dealing with student behaviors, and establishing routines for positive classroom experiences. The executive director said that he planned to continue developing and adapting the Responsive Classroom program to the school. The document entitled “Professional Development Plan 2007 - 2008” outlines a plan which includes 20 visits during the school year from a Responsive Classroom consultant. The consultant will work with grade level teachers to improve their classroom management skills through a modified lesson study format.

The consistent application of the Responsive Classroom was generally where it would be expected to be in week three of the school year. The interactions between teachers and students in classrooms were cordial, respectful, and reasoned. Interactions of staff and students in areas other than the classroom (i.e. halls, playground, office spaces) were generally low key, yet assertive. Often the adult would refer to the tenets of the Responsive Classroom philosophy and then describe and model the expectation. The consistent observations of the same students in different settings suggests that these behaviors are likely similar on non-inspection days.

Benchmark 1F Professional Development	1F	The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.
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Two key design elements in Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s charter highlight the tremendous importance of teacher professional development to “create a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members,” and providing “extensive opportunities for intensive staff development” to provide teachers “tools to make it work.” Throughout the term of its initial charter, the school has allocated extraordinary resources (time, staff and funds) to fully develop these professional development design elements. In particular, the school benefits from having three highly qualified master teachers who are also experts in the Gattegno method serving in key instructional leadership roles: the executive director and two professional development specialists. Two of these instructional leaders have been present in the school since its inception.

These instructional leaders facilitate numerous structures and processes that support teachers’ professional development specific to Gattegno approaches to literacy and mathematics. In addition to planning professional development workshops in the summer and throughout the year, these instructional leaders provide support, coaching, and mentoring to teachers on a daily basis in a variety of venues including staff meetings, team grade level meetings, informal observations and model lesson sessions. Teachers also frequently collaborate with each other in team meetings, lesson study sessions, and staff meetings. These frequent and school-based professional development structures have provided teachers and staff developers with opportunities to engage in lively and thoughtful discussions focused on instructional issues. For example, in one teacher team meeting observed by several inspection team members, a professional development specialist modeled different ways of introducing Cuiseniere rods in mathematics lessons. Teachers practiced and discussed several different introductory strategies, including creating stair patterns with the rods and playing games with the patterns to discover which rods were missing. Rather than a lecture or demonstration, the professional development specialist actively engaged teachers in a dialogue about how to better understand students’ thinking processes and to develop students’ conceptual knowledge of the rods and underlying mathematical principles. Teachers in the meeting often referenced their own and other teachers’ classroom lessons and experiences as well as previous team meeting discussions, suggesting that teachers were comfortable and familiar with engaging in reflective discussions about instructional techniques used in their classrooms. In the area of lesson study, the school’s professional development plan for the 2007-08 school year included lesson study sessions facilitated by external consultants who are experts in the Gattegno methods of “Words in Color” and “Gattegno Mathematics.”

The value of these ongoing staff development efforts for individual teachers learning Gattegno methods was evident across interviews. The teachers named these experiences as significantly contributing to the improvement of their instruction. It was clear to observers that ongoing discussions among staff members about instructional issues contributed to a collegial atmosphere that valued reflection and continuous refinement of the art of teaching.

Although school leaders have successfully created a highly collaborative environment that supports teachers in group settings, they have yet to fully develop a professional development program that attends to the individual needs of teachers. When asked “How is training teachers different than working with students?” one professional development specialist responded, “I am better aware of what I’m doing with students than what I’m doing with teachers... a lot of time it seems like what I do benefits the students, but I question how it impacts the teachers.” The specialist noted that it might be useful to require teachers to develop individual professional development plans because, “I [as a professional development specialist] need to know better what the teachers want to do so that I can mesh that with what the school wants to do.” Interviews with teachers confirmed that teachers had not yet developed individual professional development plans. The school’s executive director also spoke of the challenge of supporting individual teacher’s learning, “The hard part is to practice what we preach. If we are expecting teachers to meet students where they are...we need to do that for the teachers....” The school’s executive director said that a leadership consultant has been working with the leadership team to think about this kind of professional development issue. Other members of the leadership team spoke positively about the initial meetings they have had with the consultant regarding instructional leadership coaching, and each anticipated continuing to learn and develop instructional processes around supporting and clinically supervising teachers.

Instructional leaders were extremely reflective about the quality of the professional development opportunities offered to teachers, and in most cases articulated issues and areas of the professional development program that could be strengthened. Given that the board has approved a 50 percent increase in the professional development budget, instructional leaders will have resources to continue to develop and strengthen its program.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Benchmark 2A School Specific Non-Academic Goals	2A The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning does not have non-academic student outcomes in its Accountability Plan.

Benchmark 2B Mission & Design Elements	2B The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.
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The mission of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning, as described in its original charter states:

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning provides its students with a solid foundation for academic success through achievement that exceeds citywide averages and meets or exceeds New York State Standards and national norms in all curriculum areas tested, especially in mathematics and language arts. Our teaching constantly adjusts to the needs of our students, leading to independence, autonomy, responsibility, and a sustained love of learning, all of which contribute to high academic achievement.

Key design elements include:

- An educational focus on the approach called the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*,
 - A scientifically-based, proven approach to instruction with heavy reliance on “Words in Color” for literacy instruction and Gattegno mathematics;
 - Serving at-risk students with the attitude that all children possess the powers of learning described by the Gattegno approach;
 - Creating a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members;
 - The tools to make it work: extensive opportunities for intensive staff development; and,
 - Measurable student achievement results through performance-based accountability, including an evaluation of student performance that is woven into the fabric of every lesson.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has generally fulfilled its mission statement. High student achievement scores in mathematics and English language arts confirm that the academic program of the school is rigorous and effective.

The school has also successfully implemented its key design elements. Most teachers, students, and staff members, particularly at the lower elementary grades, have contributed to creating a unique learning environment rooted in Gattegno-focused methods. “Words in Color” and “Gattegno Mathematics” were present in all 1st through 3rd grade classrooms. Although Gattegno methods and curricula are utilized less in the upper grades, teachers for the most part were committed to the philosophy of providing student-centered instruction. All students, including those identified as students with disabilities requiring special education and students who were identified as academically at risk, were included in classroom lessons with support from basic skills teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers have numerous opportunities for intensive staff development in Gattegno methods of teaching, including professional development workshops, daily grade level team meetings, and continuous access to on-site professional development specialists who are experts

in the Gattegno approach. Although not specified as a key design element, the school's implementation of the Responsive Classroom program has aligned with and strengthened the overall philosophy of subordinating teaching to learning. Evidence suggests that it promotes a positive culture among students and teachers. School practices of morning meetings and student-created rules have resulted in students accepting responsibility for the well being of their classmates and school.

Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.
	2C.2	The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has a board of trustees that functions as a collaborative of school staff and outside resources. While the original by-laws specified four of the nine trustees as “teacher members,” subsequently approved amendments reduced the ratio to the current three teacher members out of the total 13 members. Board members represent a range of perspectives. In addition to school community members, the board retains a member who is involved in a community after school program that is used by many of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning’s students. The board also includes members with expertise in law, real estate, finance, and advertising. Several teacher and non-teacher board members studied with Caleb Gattegno and are fluent in the school’s teaching methods. The board has elected officers, holds monthly meetings, and has functioning committees. Board members seem committed to the school’s mission, and turnover has been infrequent. Of the original nine board members, seven remain on the current board.

During the school’s first charter term, the board diversified the school’s leadership structure. In the 2005-06 school year, the board instituted a dual leadership model with an executive director who would focus on the school’s instructional leadership responsibilities and a principal who would focus on the school’s day to day operations, facility and communications with parents. The board has adopted an evaluation rubric to evaluate the performance of its executive director.

To address the issue of previously high teacher turnover rates, board members focused their attention on strategies related to teacher recruitment and training. Strategies named by board members include placing novice teachers and teachers-in-training in apprenticeships through co-teaching assignments or teaching assistantships. Board members emphasized the continuing need to recruit teachers from both inside and outside the local community. Given the unique curriculum of the school, board members have also recognized the need to offer teachers “continuous professional development” opportunities, both for teachers new to the school and continuing teachers who need further training in the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning* philosophy and approach. This recognition, in part, informed the decision to almost double the school’s professional development budget for the 2007-08 school year.

Another emerging professional development priority the board described was supporting 4th and 5th grade students’ positive self-concept and motivation to succeed in school. The board saw this as particularly important to address as Bronx Charter School for Better Learning prepared students for transition to middle school. The board stated that the school has hired the Efficacy Institute to complete an assessment and recommendations for school-specific interventions in the current school year.

The board named four indicators they will use to assess the effectiveness of the additional professional development funding and programming: 1) students’ test scores; 2) informal feedback from teacher representatives; 3) feedback from teacher focus groups; and, 4) teacher retention rates.

With relatively minor exceptions, the school's board of trustees has instituted and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and appears to have abided by them. In fact, the school had an abundance of good policies and there was evidence that they were updated from time to time. For example, the emergency conditional appointment policy for recently fingerprinted employees was passed in August 2006. Other evidence of the board's policy work included the following:

- An adequate code of ethics that prohibits actual or potential conflicts of interest and directs employees and trustees to disclose any not-for-profit transactions with the school existed, and the school board has avoided creating such conflicts.
- While there was no "board book" per se, each member of the board is given a copy of the by-laws, charter and a publication developed by the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence related to governance.
- A comprehensive *Student Parent Handbook / Calendar* is produced annually. It contains much useful information for parents including a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) release for pictures and notification of rights, notice regarding meetings of the school board, the school calendar (also available on-line at the school's comprehensive website), a Freedom of Information Law policy, and a notice required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The school's separate FERPA policy did not mention the fees to be charged for copies of records nor did it contain the two required lists (persons with access and types of records available).
- The complaint policy (correctly available in the school office) appears to impermissibly set up a two-tiered system whereby parents have to first go to the executive director and then may go to the school's board. In practice, even though the board delegated the handling of complaints to the executive director, it is an effort to resolve many complaints informally at the school level while reserving parents' rights to bring complaints directly to the school board. The policy should be clarified to explicitly reserve parents' rights to complain to the school board pursuant to Education Law subdivision 2855(4). Additionally, the complaint policy did not specify that the Institute only reviews complaints alleging violations of law or of the school's charter.
- The discipline policy for students with disabilities needed to be updated for numerical changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act regulations, but there was no evidence of violations. The Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) policy also required updating for statutory changes in response timelines, and the required notice was not posted. The school lacked a supervision policy for employees appointed on an emergency conditional basis as required by Education Law subdivision 2854(3)(a-2)(iv).

Over the term of the school's charter, the school board generally appeared to be abiding by the provisions in its by-laws, including positive provisions related to conflicts of interest and self-dealing transactions, with which the board appeared to be in compliance. One minor by-laws deficiency was not specifying that any executive committee (by choice, the school has not formed one) must have at least five members. In addition, the provision related to the removal of officers (with or without cause at any time) is not in compliance with the procedures in Education Law subdivision 226(8).

Benchmark 2D	2D	Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.
Parents & Students		

In school-administered surveys provided to the inspection team by the school and at a meeting held at the school at the time of the renewal visit, parents had very strong positive attitudes about teachers, school leaders, and the school in general. During the renewal visit, the inspection team interviewed approximately 10 parents who had children enrolled in grades across the school. Overall, parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the academic curriculum. Parents appreciated having the opportunity to attend workshops to learn about the Gattegno methods of teaching. One parent said, “That class was an eye opener. It has helped me understand what they are doing in school.” Another parent noted, “The way they teach these kids is different from how we learned. Since they get accustomed to learn a certain way, [with the workshop training] we [parents] can learn and reinforce what they learn here.”

Parents also enthusiastically described a social atmosphere that “feels like home.” One parent stated, “It’s like a family-oriented atmosphere. The teachers take these kids like they are their own kids. They know who you are and where your child is. This is a village. They know me by my first name. If you leave a message at the school, they call home. It makes me so comfortable. The nurse calls the mother about little things, not just my son’s asthma, but even paper cuts.” Her statement was accompanied by many nods and verbal agreements from other parents.

The school’s principal in particular has effectively made strong communications with parents and the local community. Many parents named the school’s principal as a trusted school contact. This strong connection is in part due to the fact that the principal lives in the community and shares an immigrant experience with many of the student’s families. The principal explained, “I bring a perspective to the school no one else has. Our constituents are primarily from the Caribbean. It helps in terms of relations with the parent body and student body. Most of the parents, I can speak to them...in a direct way, even a personal way because we come from similar backgrounds.” The school’s psychologist, who is Nigerian, also stated that he continually draws from his own experiences to connect with the high numbers of immigrant families served by the school.

Over the life of its charter, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has maintained a strong and consistent student population. The school maintains a substantial wait list (400 students), and has maintained strong student attendance (over 96%) and retention rates (over 85%) throughout its initial charter period. The principal stated that the school has on average five families who withdraw each year, mainly due to travel or distance issues. According to the school’s renewal application, only three of 62 students clearly left the school because of parental dissatisfaction (Attachment G-3).

Benchmark 2E Legal Requirements	2E The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.
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As part of the Institute’s legal review, correspondence in the Institute’s files between the school and the State Education Department was reviewed. The approval of the school’s SAVE Plan (Safe Schools Against Violence in Education school safety plan), which was submitted in January 2005 and re-submitted in January 2007 in response to December 2006 SED comments, had been an issue. However, after the school had contacted SED in June 2007, the plan was finally approved. In the school building at the time of the renewal inspection visit, the SAVE Plan appeared to be in place and safety features were present. The only other issue flagged by SED was compliance with the teacher certification requirements of the Charter Schools Act. Production of records to support qualification for non-certified teachers under the Act appeared to be the issue, which was fully resolved at the time of the renewal inspection visit.

At the time of the renewal inspection visit the school appeared to be in compliance with the following: federal law related to not discriminating against English language learners even though the school did not have any children so classified as evidenced by issuance of home language surveys; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the highly qualified teachers provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The school also appeared to be providing alternative instruction to suspended students in compliance with the State’s compulsory education law and performing criminal background checks of employees in compliance with the Charter Schools Act.

During the term of the school’s charter, the Institute received no official complaints and only one unofficial employee complaint regarding the school. The latter involved the non-renewal of an uncertified teacher’s contract in 2007. Subsequent to the non-renewal of the contract, the teacher had several questions regarding teacher certification and charter schools. The Institute provided the requested information to the instructor and referred the individual to the school’s board. No further Institute action was required.

One minor New York Public Officers Law issue was noted. It appeared that minutes were not being kept for all school board committee meetings in possible violation of the Open Meetings Law even though it was represented that the committees report to the board at public meetings.

The school has four attorneys among its trustees and, as set forth in the renewal application, maintains an active relationship with outside counsel regarding personnel and other matters.

With the minor exceptions noted above and under Benchmark 2C.2, the school appeared to be in general and substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations and the terms of its charter during its initial charter period and at the time of the renewal visit. Also, the school generally has maintained effective systems and controls for legal compliance, which was apparent at the time of the renewal visit.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning	3A The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.

For the term of its charter, the school has operated pursuant to long range plans. The school’s annual budgets have provided a realistic framework for the school’s spending activities and monitoring procedures are in place. Annual budgets have been approved in a timely manner by the board. Input is solicited from all professional staff members and incorporated into an initial, draft budget presented to the board for its consideration at least two months prior to the June 30th annual deadline. The school has maintained adequate cash flow to support operations and, with the exception of its first year, the school’s actual and budgeted revenues have exceeded actual expenses.

A financial report has been presented at virtually every board meeting. During the past two years, in addition to a budget vs. actual comparison, balance sheet and profit/loss statements, detailed information has been provided on accounts payable, accounts receivable, all credit card transactions and actual and projected cash flow. Based on the recommendation of its finance/audit committee, the board reviews and approves, at least once annually, modifications as needed to its budget to adjust expense and revenue lines to reflect updated information.

<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3B</p> <p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management’s direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p>
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The school exhibits a commendable “tone at the top” that promotes a commitment to integrity and ethical values. Based on interviews with staff and review of documentation, the school has established appropriate processes and controls related to payroll, procurement, safeguarding of assets and other financial matters. The school has a written financial practices manual that has been clarified and updated over time. Areas of major enhancement of the manual over the past year are policies related to credit card use, travel and business expenses, and purchasing guidelines. The school has a system to record and safeguard fixed assets and has created appropriate and effective systems for ensuring that it meets compliance requirements.

Over the life of its charter, the school has transitioned nicely from an outsourced model for part of their bookkeeping and financial services to a model whereby they now have a finance and operations manager in-house with continued outside bookkeeping support. Throughout this time, the board and the school leadership have been diligent and particularly attentive to the school’s finances. A review of the board minutes for the school shows evidence of the board’s active role in the school’s financial operations. School finance updates are given at virtually all board meetings. The board participates in the development of the annual budget and reviews and approves it. The school’s independent Certified Public Accountant presents the results of the audit to the board annually, which is considered a best practice.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p>
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The school’s record of financial reporting has been exemplary. Each required report has been submitted in a timely manner, and such reporting has been complete and accurate. Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor’s opinion, the school’s financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. All statements required by generally accepted accounting principles were included in the school’s financial statements.

The school’s annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. The school board reviews and approves acceptance of its annual financial statement audit report. As part of that process, the board meets with the independent auditors, which is considered a best practice.

Benchmark 3D Financial Condition	3D	The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).
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The school completed the 2006-07 school year in strong and improved financial condition. The school's total net assets increased by \$306,203 and it finished with total net assets of \$669,671. The school increased its cash position by \$319,605. The school has property and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation and amortization) totaling \$87,570 that consists of furniture fixtures and computer equipment.

The school has no long-term debt and leases space from the NYCDOE for \$1 per year. This shared use agreement has allowed the school to strengthen its financial condition over time. The school has been prudent in its spending and done a fairly good job of maximizing the amount of funds spent on its program while acknowledging the reality that it does not have a written commitment beyond one year for the shared use agreement. As a result, it is important that the school accumulate funds to give it flexibility should the agreement change in the future. The school has done that and as of June 30, 2007 had expendable net assets of \$504,899⁴ or 16 percent of its FY 2008 budget.

The school has generated adequate cash flow to support operations. Spending per student (total expenses, including grant related, divided by the revised approved enrollment) in each year was as follows:

2004	2005	2006	2007
\$ 15,577	\$ 10,100	\$ 9,656	\$ 10,731

The decline in per pupil spending through FY 2006 can be attributed primarily to increased efficiencies due to enrollment growth and a decrease in start-up expenses.

⁴ Unrestricted net assets of \$942,123, plus temporarily restricted net assets of \$13,000, subtracted by net property and equipment (\$450,224).

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 4 Should the School’s Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?
Benchmark 4A Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)	4A Key structural elements of the school’s plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

In its renewal application, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning indicates that it is not planning any significant changes to the school’s structure during the next charter term. The school is planning to make some minor changes to fulfill, and expand upon, the terms of its original charter. For example, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning plans to add a kindergarten next year, thus fulfilling the original chartered grades of kindergarten through 5th grade. The school has secured appropriate facilities for the kindergarten program in PS 111, a school adjacent to Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. Additionally, the school is planning to provide its upper grade students, including graduating 5th graders, with academic and social support through partnering with the Efficacy Institute.

The school has budgeted for additional leadership positions, including a director of assessment and an additional professional development specialist. These positions will likely contribute to the successful expansion and refinement of the school’s professional development and assessment capacities. Additionally, these additional leadership positions will provide the school with the potential to develop an internal leadership succession plan. This potential is particularly important given the school’s unique focus on using Gattegno teaching methods.

Benchmark 4B Plans for the Educational Program	4B The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.
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According to its Application for Renewal, for the next charter period, Bronx Charter School for Better Learning seeks to continue its current education program. As previously approved, the school will add three sections of kindergarten in the 2008-09 school year. The school is not seeking to add additional grades or increase enrollment during this charter period.

Key design elements as outlined in the school’s initial charter application include the following:

- educational focus on the approach called the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*;
- a scientifically-based, proven approach to instruction with heavy reliance on “Word in Color” for literacy instruction and “Gattegno Mathematics;”
- serving at-risk students with the attitude that all children possess the powers of learning described by the Gattegno approach;
- creating a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members;
- the tools to make it work: extensive opportunities for intensive staff development; and
- measurable student achievement results through performance-based accountability, including an evaluation of student performance that is woven into the fabric of every lesson.

Based on the data collected at the time of the renewal inspection visit, it appears that Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has generally successfully implemented all of these key design elements. Notably, the school has maintained an educational focus on the approach called the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning* in a unique learning environment. The school has built a strong foundation upon which it may continue to focus on training novice faculty members to use Gattegno-focused pedagogy and measure student achievement through using informal (“up-close”) and formal (“step back”) measures. A new supervisor of instruction and accountability position will be created in 2008-09 to support the school’s efforts in maintaining a strong focus on student achievement.

According to its Application for Renewal, in the next charter period, the school will continue to rely on the use of Gattegno-based methods and materials for the teaching of English language arts and mathematics while supplementing that program with the use of other commercially-produced and teacher-made resources. Science 21 will be used for science and a new program of social studies will be implemented. The school states that its curriculum as currently implemented, except in the area of social studies, remains fully aligned with the New York State performance standards.

Bronx Charter School of Better Learning has successfully revised its proposed Accountability Plan to reflect the Institute’s current renewal standards. The revised plan, to be in effect up to the year of the next renewal, includes five required measures to be contained within the school’s English language arts and mathematics goals as well as measures for science and social studies.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for the Governance Structure</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</p>
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The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter that does not include any material changes from the present structure. The school provided a set of legally sufficient by-laws. The board was clear on its duties and responsibilities as well as the things it needs to accomplish going forward. The school has a clear code of ethics that details the expected conduct of school stakeholders and sets a high standard for officers and employees. Responses to interview questions and other evidence, including questions regarding school oversight, demonstrate that the school’s governance model is sustainable for a five-year renewal term.

<p>Benchmark 4D Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4 D The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.</p>
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The school has presented a reasonable and appropriate fiscal plan for the proposed new charter period. The plan provides ample support to the school’s program with increased monetary support for professional development and basic skills support. A high percentage of the school’s five year budgets is devoted to personnel costs (80 percent of total expenses) which is consistent with the school’s current budget and actual expenses last year.

The plan relies on continued high demand for enrollment in the school, as reflected by a reported waitlist of 400 students. Extending the current facility arrangements with the NYCDOE would also be necessary. Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. The school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts.

The school’s fiscal plan projects a modest increase in its financial position over the proposed renewal charter period with some reliance on fundraising. The school has shown the capacity to successfully raise private funds in the past. In addition, the school is adding a new position this year, entitled director of development, designed to expand its fundraising capacity.

The school’s fiscal plan estimates annual increases in per pupil revenue of three percent. While the projected increases are not assured, they are significantly less than the historical average increase over the life of the school (6.8 percent). Other assumptions for revenue and expenses are also considered reasonable. The school has an excellent track record in planning, budgeting and monitoring expenses.

APPENDIX

An Overview of Renewal Requirements

The New York State Charter Schools Act of 1998 (as amended) (the “Act”) authorizes the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York to grant charters for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools. Charter schools provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independent of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.¹

In order to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under the Act, the State University Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. Among its duties, the Institute is charged with evaluating charter schools’ applications for renewal and providing its resulting findings and recommendations to the State University Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the State University Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, details the merits of a school’s case for renewal. This report has been created and issued pursuant to the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (the “State University Renewal Practices”).²

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. There is no limitation upon the number of times that a charter may be renewed. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application, whether such application be for an initial renewal or any subsequent renewal:

¹ See § 2850 of the New York Education Law.

² The *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University Board of Trustees* (revised December 13, 2005) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.³

The Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.⁴

As a charter authorizing entity, the State University Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings ("Required Findings"):

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner;
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act; and,
- (if applicable) in a school district where the total enrollment of resident students attending charter schools in the base year is greater than five percent of the total public school enrollment of the school district in the base year: (i) granting the application would have a significant educational benefit to the students expected to attend the proposed charter school; or (ii) the school district in which the charter school will be located consents to such application.⁵

Where the State University Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.⁶ The Regents may approve the proposed charter or return the proposed charter to the State University Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation(s). In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the current charter expires. In the latter case (return to the State University Trustees), the State University Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the State University Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law; as above, it will become operational upon expiration of the current charter.⁷

³ Education Law § 2851(4).

⁴ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsRenewOverview.htm.

⁵ See Education Law § 2852(2).

⁶ See Education Law § 2852(5).

⁷ See Education Law §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b).

Process for Initial Renewals

While the Initial Renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan")⁸ setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").⁹ This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures and to provide feedback to the school on the Institute's conclusions. Reports and debriefings for the school's board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute identifies potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a school visit to look specifically at the strength of the school's program and the evidence it is accumulating to support the school's case for renewal. The number, breadth and scope of visits that the Institute conducts depend primarily on the school's performance on standardized assessments.

By the start of the last year of a school's charter (as set forth above), the school must submit an application for charter renewal, setting forth the evidence required by law and the State University Trustees. Applicant charter schools are asked to formulate and report evidence of success in answer to four renewal questions:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school an effective, viable organization?
3. Is the school fiscally sound?
4. What are the school's plans for the term of the next charter and are they reasonable, feasible and achievable?

The application is reviewed by Institute staff. The staff also conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This audit includes examination of the school's charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan

⁸ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/schoolsAccountability.htm> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examines audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, the leader of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete. Renewal visit team members conduct a variety of activities to get a sense of the educational program and determine if there are material deficiencies. These activities include: visiting classes, observing lessons, examining student work and other documents, observing school meetings, interviewing staff members and speaking informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's board of trustees and administrators.

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of *Qualitative Education Benchmarks*, often referred to as the "Renewal Benchmarks," that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the Accountability Plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.¹⁰

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team finalizes the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks are discussed and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark. The team members' completed benchmark comments present a focus for discussion and a summary of the findings. The benchmarks are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support—but do not individually or in limited combination provide—the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation. The Institute then prepares a draft report and provides a copy to the school for its review and comment. The draft contains the findings, discussion and the evidence base for those findings, as well as a preliminary recommendation.

The following renewal outcomes are available to schools that are in their first charter period.¹¹ Each outcome contains specific criteria that a school must meet in order to be eligible for that outcome. These criteria are keyed to one or more of the Required Findings. In addition to any specific criteria set forth in a particular outcome, a school, to be eligible for any type of renewal, must be able to provide evidence that permits the State University to make *each* of the Required Findings:

- *Early Renewal*: available to a school that after three years of operation has accumulated three years of data in multiple grades on all or nearly all of the standardized assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan and for the last two years has met or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals based on its performance on those measures. In addition, the State University must find that the educational program, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is sound and effective. Early Renewal will be for a full-term of five years only.
- *Short-Term Planning Year Renewal*: available to a school that has taken one or more planning years and has yet to be renewed. The renewal term will be equal in length to the

¹⁰ See <http://www.effectiveschools.com>.

¹¹ A school that is awarded a short-term planning year renewal is still considered a school in its initial charter period when it comes again to renewal in its fifth full year of operation.

number of planning years the school has taken. The State University Trustees must be able to determine that the educational program will be sound during the next charter period based on the available outcomes on the standardized assessment measures and any data available as gathered using the Qualitative Education Benchmarks.

- *Full-Term Renewal*: available to a school in its fifth year, Full-Term Renewal is for the maximum term of five years. In order for a school to be eligible for Full-Term Renewal, a school must at the time of renewal either (a) have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is effective or (b) made strong overall progress towards meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals and have in place at the time of the renewal review an educational program that, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is particularly strong and effective.
- *Renewal with Conditions*: available to a school that (a) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term Renewal as regards its educational program, but that has material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that cannot be fully corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to making each and every other required finding, or (b) meets the standards for Full-Term Renewal or Short-Term Renewal as regards some portion of its educational program, but requires conditions to improve the academic program. Such conditions may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on the number of students and grades served. Conditions may also be imposed that are consonant with the requirements of NCLB as to schools requiring corrective action. Where appropriate, conditions may be imposed which if not met by the school shall be deemed a substantial and material violation of the school's charter and therefore expose the school to probation or charter revocation.
- *Short-Term Renewal*: available to a school in its fifth year that (a) has compiled an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement as measured by the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals, but that has in place and in operation at the time of the renewal review an academic program of sufficient strength and effectiveness, as assessed by the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, that will likely result in the school's being able to meet or come close to meeting those goals with the additional time that renewal would permit or (b) has compiled an overall record of meeting or coming close to meeting its Accountability Plan academic goals but that at the time of the renewal visit, has in place an educational program that, based on its assessment pursuant to the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, is inadequate in multiple and material respects. Typically, but not always, Short-Term Renewal will be for two years. Short-Term Renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to educational, organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring Renewal*: available to a school that does not meet the standards for any type of renewal but which submits plans to the State University Trustees for a restructuring of the school that legally commits the school to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including, but not necessarily limited to, a new board of trustees, administrative team, academic program, organizational structure, and such plans, if implemented, would lead to the school likely meeting its standardized

assessment measures set forth in its Accountability Plan during the next charter period. Whether to permit a school to submit an application for a Restructuring Renewal is at the discretion of the State University.

- *Non-Renewal:* where a school does not present a case for any kind of renewal, the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

Upon receiving a school's comments on the draft report, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and renders its findings and recommendations in their final form. The report is then transmitted to the Committee on Charter Schools of the State University Board of Trustees, the other members of the State University Trustees and the school itself. This report is the product of that process.