



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning Third-Year Inspection Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The third-year inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. The inspection during the school's third year of its charter provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward its academic and organizational goals.

The third year inspection complements the yearly reviews conducted by SUNY Charter Schools Institute (CSI) staff and takes into account the school's own annual reports of progress toward the targets defined in its Accountability Plan. The visit provides an independent assessment of the school's progress and provides recommendations for gathering and presenting valid and reliable evidence to the authorizer as the school prepares to apply for charter renewal in its fifth year of operation. The recommendations represent the experienced opinions of the inspection team and are intended to offer the school guidance for enhancing the evidence base for its renewal application.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning was conducted on April 4-6, 2006 by an independent team of experienced educators from SchoolWorks, Beverly, MA.

- **Mihran Keoseian**, Project Associate, SchoolWorks: Mihran brings 30 years of leadership experience to SchoolWorks. As a former principal of both middle and high schools, he consistently improved reading and mathematics scores and college placement rates. As a superintendent, he developed procedures and systems that resulted in his school district achieving within the top one percent of schools in Massachusetts.
- **Dominique Astier**, Consultant, SchoolWorks: Dominique taught French and Spanish for 15 years in Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts and served as a department head, student counselor and teacher mentor. For the past eight years, she has been working as a consultant, conducting charter school inspections and DOE reviews of underperforming and exemplary schools in Massachusetts and New York; developing and guiding the execution of new curricula and programs; and, conducting program evaluations in various states across the nation.
- **Heather Higgins**, Consultant, SchoolWorks: Heather taught high school English and middle school language arts in Guilford County, North Carolina. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of North Carolina,

Greensboro, where she also works with undergraduate education students as a university instructor and supervisor.

- **Aretha Miller**, Director of Marketing, SchoolWorks: Aretha has five years' experience leading charter school renewal and site visits. Prior to joining SchoolWorks, Aretha worked as a special education teacher in Boston Public Schools for eight years and spent three years developing and implementing programs that support at-risk youths in traditional and alternative educational settings.

The team used the school's Accountability Plan goals as the guide for their examination, along with the set of framework questions included in the inspection protocol to assess the school's academic and organizational effectiveness. Prior to the one-and-a-half-day visit, the team reviewed the school's documents, including its annual *Accountability Progress Report*, its original charter application and reports from previous informal site visits by the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. At the school, the team interviewed school administrators, Board representatives, staff, parents and students, and visited classes to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals.

This report is organized in two parts. *Part I: School Progress Report*, offers the team's judgments about the school's effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the charter school law (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

- improving student learning and achievement;
- increasing learning opportunities for all students (particularly students at risk of academic failure);
- encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- creating new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- expanding parental choice in public schools; and
- moving from a rule-based to performance-based accountability system by holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

The judgments of the team are organized into three categories: academic program, organizational viability and unique programmatic areas. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in **Appendix A**.

The second section of the report, *Part II: School Accountability Plan – Assessment and Recommendations*, reflects the team's assessment of the quality of the school's measures of its progress and offers suggestions for enhancing the evidence base on which renewal decisions will be made at the school's fifth year of operation. A brief rationale for the inspection team's recommendations is presented in narrative form, along with a summary table, in **Appendix B**.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning (“Bronx Better Learning”) opened its doors in September 2003 and enrolled 50 first graders only during its first year of operation. The school added a grade each successive year and currently enrolls 162 students in grades 1-3. Bronx Better Learning will add a fourth grade in the fall of 2006 and a fifth grade in 2007, thereby becoming a fully operational elementary school (grades 1–5), as stipulated in its charter. The school’s mission is to “provide its students with a solid foundation for academic success through achievement that exceeds city-wide averages and meets or exceeds New York State standards and national norms in all curriculum areas tested, especially in mathematics and language arts.”

Bronx Better Learning is located in the annex of PS 111 Seton Falls Elementary – a site that provides enough space for the school’s planned expansion. The school facility is warm and welcoming, with student work displayed in the hallways. The classrooms are spacious and comfortably accommodate students (an average of 18 in each class). The classrooms are decorated with commercially-produced and teacher-made posters. They are well-resourced with enough books and materials for each student.

The academic program at Bronx Better Learning is grounded in the educational philosophy known as the Subordination of Teaching to Learning. The philosophy is based on the belief that it is the responsibility of teachers to help every child become a critical, independent thinker. Although the Words in Color program and Gattegno Mathematics (which relies on the use of manipulatives – primarily Cuisenaire rods) are the primary materials used to deliver literacy and mathematics instruction in the school, teachers also use a variety of other instructional materials to support student learning.

There are currently nine full-time teachers, a full-time professional development specialist, a Title I teacher who also serves as the Teacher Trainer, and a part-time music teacher on staff at Bronx Better Learning. The Title I teacher and the nine classroom teachers are all certified by New York State in elementary education. The part-time music teacher is not certified but has an advanced degree in music. The school’s administrative team includes the executive director, principal and office manager. The school is governed by an eleven-member Board of Trustees.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

QUESTION 1: To what extent have the students attained expected skills and knowledge?

1. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning does not have results for student performance on the New York State assessments.

Bronx Better Learning did not administer any of the New York State assessments to its students because the school did not have students who were eligible to take the tests. Consequently, there are no data to conduct an analysis of student performance on statewide assessments.

2. The mean scores for student performance on the TerraNova either meet or exceed the national norm of 50 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCEs).

The TerraNova results for students at Bronx Better Learning show that students are performing within or above the national norm on the reading, language and mathematics subtests.

In spring 2004, first graders performed the strongest on the language subtest with 63.1 NCEs. They scored 58.6 NCEs and 52.7 NCEs on the reading and mathematics subtests, respectively. The performance of first graders on the spring 2005 administration of the TerraNova is comparable to that of first graders in 2004. They performed the strongest on the language subtest (58.8 NCEs), followed by reading (56.2 NCEs) and mathematics (50.1 NCEs).

Second graders performed well on the reading (51.1 NCEs) and language (62.4 NCEs) subtests. They performed slightly below the national norm, however, on the mathematics subtest – with 48.8 NCEs.

**Table 1: Bronx Better Learning TerraNova results in NCEs for 1st & 2nd grade-level cohorts
Spring 2004 & 2005**

Grade	Spring 2004			Spring 2005		
	(N) Reading	(N) Language	(N) Math	(N) Reading	(N) Language	(N) Math
1	(48) 58.6	(48) 63.1	(48) 52.7	(46) 56.2	(46) 58.8	(46) 50.1
2	NA	NA	NA	(50) 51.1	(50) 62.4	(50) 48.8

The spring 2005 TerraNova results for second graders who attended Bronx Charter School for Better Learning for two years show that they are performing above the national norm in both reading (51.5 NCEs) and language (63.3 NCEs). The students performed slightly below the norm, however, on the mathematics subtest – with 48.4 NCEs.

Table 2: Bronx Better Learning TerraNova results in NCEs for the matched cohort of second graders

Spring 2005			
Grade	2005		
	(N) Reading	(N) Language	(N) Mathematics
2	(44) 51.5	(44) 63.3	(44) 48.4

QUESTION 2: What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?**1. Generally, students at Bronx Better Learning are attaining expected skills and knowledge as measured by the TerraNova.**

The fall 2004 and spring 2005 TerraNova results for first graders show that they have made significant gains on the reading, language and mathematics subtests. The students posted a gain of 26.7 NCEs for reading, 23.2 NCEs for language and 26.2 NCEs for mathematics.

Table 3: Bronx Better Learning Grade 1 grade-level cohort TerraNova results in NCEs Fall 2004 - Spring 2005¹

	Subject	Number	Fall '04	Spring '05	Gain
Grade 1	Reading	46	29.5	56.2	26.7
	Language	46	35.6	58.8	23.2
	Mathematics	46	23.9	50.1	26.2

The TerraNova results for spring 2004 and spring 2005 for the matched cohort of second graders at Bronx Better Learning show a moderate decrease in their performance on two of the three subtests. In spring 2004, the students scored 58.2 NCEs in reading, compared to 51.5 NCEs in spring 2005. They posted a loss, therefore, of 6.7 NCEs.

The performance of the second graders on the mathematics subtest was similar to their performance in reading, in that they posted a loss of 6.5 NCEs (scored 54.9 NCEs in spring 2004 compared to 48.4 NCEs in spring 2005). They performed slightly below the national norm in mathematics, therefore, with 48.4 NCEs.

As a result, the school achieved its accountability measure in reading to have second graders “exceed an average NCE of 50 if its first grade average NCE exceeded 50.” Bronx Better Learning, however, did not achieve its accountability measure in mathematics to have second graders exceed an average NCE of 50 if its first grade average NCE exceeded 50.”

¹The gains were achieved from fall to spring, an interval whose gains are typically greater than those from spring to spring.

There was no noticeable difference in their performance on the language subtest; that is, they scored 63.8 NCEs in spring 2004 and 63.3 NCEs in spring 2005.

Table 4: Bronx Better Learning Grade 2 matched cohort TerraNova results in NCEs

	Subject	Number	Spring '04	Spring '05	Gain
Grade 2	Reading	44	58.2	51.5	-6.7
	Language	44	63.8	63.3	-0.5
	Mathematics	44	54.9	48.4	-6.5

2. Bronx Better Learning has achieved its goal to have 75 percent of students pass the end-of-unit tests on the NYSTROM Exploring Where and Why curricula.

During the 2004-2005 school year, Bronx Better Learning was consistently successful in having at least 83 percent of its students in grades 1 and 2 pass the NYSTROM end-of-unit tests. This exceeded the school's goal to have 75 percent of students pass each end-of-unit test.

The results for the first graders in 2003-2004 were mixed though generally positive. As the percentage of students passing the end-of-unit tests ranged from 69 percent (Unit 4) to 96 percent (Unit 2), the school did not achieve the 75 percent passing rate in all five units, exceeding that rate in three and coming close in the other two..

Table 5: Bronx Better Learning Grade 1 NYSTROM in Percentages 2003-2004

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
# Taking exam	45	45	47	48	46
% who passes	71	96	81	69	85

Table 6: Bronx Better Learning Grade 1 NYSTROM in Percentages 2004-2005

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
# Taking exam	49	48	50	48
% who passes	84	83	84	79

Table 7: Bronx Better Learning Grade 2 NYSTROM in Percentages 2004-2005

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
# Taking exam	50	49	51	51
% who passes	100	92	86	94

QUESTION 3: Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse students?**1. The curriculum at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning provides a sound foundation for the school's academic program.**

A review of Bronx Better Learning curriculum documents shows that they are clearly aligned to the New York State learning standards. In addition to clearly highlighting the standards that students must meet at each grade level, school leaders took the additional step of identifying explicitly the skills, concepts and content associated with each standard. In other words, the curriculum at Bronx Better Learning has a well-developed scope and sequence for all core subject areas for grades 1-3. As a result, a majority of teachers are able to engage in lesson planning that is purposeful and specifically designed to help students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for them to achieve success on internal and external assessments.

An examination of the school's curriculum documents shows that there is no scope and sequence for grades 4 and 5. Their absence is significant because Bronx Better Learning is scheduled to have its first cohort of fourth graders in the upcoming school year. Despite this, the curriculum at Bronx Better Learning for the current grades provides teachers with a cohesive and coherent framework for teaching and learning.

2. The degree to which teachers address the needs of diverse learners varies significantly from class to class.

There is ample evidence that teachers at Bronx Better Learning are working hard to adhere to the school's philosophy of the Subordination of Teaching to Learning. All teachers worked to make their classrooms more student-centered and to create opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning. Despite this, the overall quality of instruction at Bronx Better Learning was uneven. There are some teachers who demonstrate effective instructional practice; others who do not.

The skilled teachers at Bronx Better Learning were observed using a variety of strategies to engage and motivate students. For example, they would diligently ask students to explain their thinking, which is a key component of the Subordination of Teaching to Learning instructional model. In one class, the teacher very carefully asked students to think about the point they were trying to make before answering questions. She would use probing questions such as, "How did you get your answer?" "Which pieces of evidence from the text did you use to arrive at your answer?" and "How do you know this to be true?" to get students to think more deeply about what they were learning. In a science classroom in which the lesson objective focused on seeds, the teacher provided numerous accommodations for varied learning styles. By employing visual, auditory and tactile strategies, she was able to build the scaffold the students needed to deepen their understanding of the life cycle of a flower seed. Skilled teachers at Bronx Better Learning used adequate wait time, cooperative learning groups and one-on-one support within their lessons to support all learners. These teachers also made effective use of the instructional aides (if they had them) in their classes. They made sure that these individuals were actively monitoring the progress of each student and providing instructional support to those students who needed it.

The teachers who were not proficient in the Gattegno methodology were observed relying on teacher-led instruction as the primary way to engage students in learning. In these classes, team members observed that there were limited opportunities for student interaction and response, with most student dialogue consisting of simple, choral responses. Also, these teachers did not consistently check students' understanding of the lesson and did not make adequate use of the aide in their classes. In one class, for example, the teacher spent almost 30 minutes working with three students without ever checking in with the other students in the classroom, some of whom were clearly confused by the assignment. There was also an aide in the class who worked with two students only and who did not monitor the progress of the other students. The learning needs of all students were not addressed, even though there were two adults in the classroom.

In some of these classes in which instruction was not strong, discipline was also an issue. The teachers had difficulty getting all the students to follow directions. Consequently, the teachers spent time redirecting students – thus greatly reducing the amount of time spent on instruction. Based on these observations, members of the inspection team concluded that the teachers who are less adept in the Gattegno approach are least likely to provide instructional support that addresses the diverse learning needs of the youngsters in their classrooms.

It is important to note that one of the key components of the Gattegno approach is the use of manipulatives as an effective tool for addressing the needs of diverse learners. All teachers at Bronx Charter School for Better Learning were observed using the Cuisenaire rods in their mathematics lessons. This is significant. The use of the rods provides students with a concrete way to learn and apply the various mathematical concepts that are being addressed in their classes. The students who are advanced are able to transition to working with abstract mathematical symbols, while their peers continue to work with the rods. In other words, the use of manipulatives makes it possible for a majority of teachers to address the different learning needs of the students in their mathematics classes.

3. There are programs and personnel in place to meet the needs of learners.

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning provides additional instructional support to at-risk students through its Targeted Assistance Title I program. Currently, the school provides Title I support to 35 students in grades 1-3 only in the area of mathematics. Depending on students' learning needs, the school uses a push-in/pull-out model to provide Title I services. The Title I teacher reported that she co-teaches the mathematics lesson with the classroom teacher whenever she is providing push-in services to students. The Title I teacher was, indeed, observed co-teaching a mathematics lesson with the classroom teacher. Both teachers were actively involved in delivering instruction to students and they took turns monitoring student progress and providing one-on-one support when it was needed. No instructional time was lost as they transitioned between planned activities and, as such, they were able to maintain student engagement in the lesson. This observation made it clear that the co-teaching model is an integral part of students' learning experience in mathematics at Bronx Better Learning.

Students, based on their performance on the TerraNova mathematics subtest, as well as on teacher recommendation, are identified for Title I services. More specifically, students who score

below 50 NCEs and who do not demonstrate adequate growth in mathematics during the course of a school year are selected and provided with Title I services. A review of school documents show that these students are monitored frequently. Teachers constantly review their daily work and administer a mid-year mathematics assessment to evaluate the students' acquisition of expected skills and knowledge in mathematics. Both classroom teachers and the Title I teacher stated that they use student performance data to adjust their approach to instruction to better support students. Due to the time constraints of the two-day visit, team members did not have the opportunity to confirm whether this was happening in every classroom.

School leaders hired a full-time consultant to work with students who are not making adequate progress in the area of English language arts. This consultant provides instructional support to students in a manner that is similar to that of the Title I teacher. Class observations showed that the ELA consultant is knowledgeable regarding the Subordination of Teaching to Learning approach and is able to successfully use the Words in Color technique to reinforce students' literacy development.

School leaders have established a Pupil Assistance Team (PAT) designed to help teachers address the needs of struggling students. Members of the PAT include the Title I teacher, ELA consultant, the principal and the student's teacher. During the PAT meetings, the team tries to identify the factors that are impacting the student's learning and then design an action plan for support. The classroom teacher is expected to implement the steps outlined in the action plan and to monitor the student's progress to see if any real change has occurred as a result of the additional instructional support.

School leaders at Bronx Better Learning have requested that the New York City Department of Education provide special education services to its students through its Region 2 Committee on Special Education. Currently, there are three students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) at Bronx Better Learning. It was reported that these students are receiving related services in the areas of speech and language and counseling. The school's executive director, who has New York State certification in special education, is responsible for providing oversight of the special education program.

QUESTION 4: Do the school's standards reflect the implementation of high academic expectations?

1. Classroom observation and review of student work samples indicate that there is no common definition of high academic expectations for all students.

Both teachers and administrators at Bronx Better Learning spoke of their commitment to implementing high expectations for all students. They pointed out that the school's adherence of the Subordination of Teaching to Learning is evidence that the school is dedicated to holding students to high academic standards. However, classroom observations show that not all teachers are proficient in the use of the Subordination of Teaching to Learning methodology and, as such, there is no consistent implementation of high academic expectations in the classes observed.

As noted earlier in this report, the teachers who are more facile in the Gattegno approach were observed challenging students to apply and extend what they have learned beyond the classroom walls. In a third grade social studies class, for example, the teacher used an editorial on immigration that was written in the *New York Times* to reinforce the lesson on the steps that Congress takes to enact laws in the United States. In terms of the language used and concepts presented, the article was clearly written above the students' grade level, but the teacher used strategies to activate students' prior knowledge on immigration and the different branches of government. She pushed the students to make inferences and predictions about the article. As a result, the students were able to not only apply what they know about the role of Congress in the U.S. government but were able to speak eloquently about how the issue of immigration impacts their lives. All students were actively engaged and motivated to learn.

In the classes in which the teachers were still not comfortable with the Gattegno approach, the instruction and classroom dialogue were less robust. These teachers asked questions that were primarily at the literal level of comprehension. As noted earlier, student dialogue consisted mainly of simple, choral responses. In a mathematics class in which the focus was on the multiplication of common fractions, the teacher did not take advantage of the many teachable moments that presented themselves during the course of the lesson. For example, one student asked the teacher if he could apply a similar approach to the multiplication of mixed numbers. Instead of engaging the student in the conversation when it was evident that he was trying to extend his understanding of the concept, the teacher told him that she was not going to answer the question because it was not the focus of the lesson. There were other instances like this in other classes, in which the teachers limited the classroom dialogue to what they wanted to cover in their lessons. It was not clear, therefore, how these teachers intend to help their students become independent, critical thinkers when they inadvertently stymied student curiosity about topics and concepts that are being addressed in the class.

The inconsistent use of behavior management strategies appears also to be a barrier to school leaders' efforts to have high academic expectations for all students at Bronx Better Learning. Behavior was not an issue in classes where students were actively engaged in learning. Some of the teachers who struggle with the Gattegno approach, however, have yet to create and maintain classroom environments that are conducive for active learning and high achievement for all students. Team members observed that these teachers, due to the fact that they spend a lot of time redirecting student behavior, were not making adequate use of instructional time.

School leaders are aware that behavior is an issue in some classes and have taken a series of steps to rectify it. Both the principal and executive director, for example, are a constant presence in the school. They are frequently in classrooms observing teacher interaction with students. Team members observed them helping teachers deal with behavioral issues in their classrooms and providing additional instructional support to students. Teachers also reported that, when necessary, the executive director models strategies associated with the Gattegno approach to those teachers who need this kind of support.

School leaders have also contracted with the Northeast Foundation for Children to conduct a two-stage process of in-service training for all teachers in understanding and using the principles

found in the Responsive Classroom approach to class management. The first stage of the training was held in February 2006 and the second, involving a series of five workshop sessions, is currently underway. The training is expected to be completed by the end of this school year. In general, students at Bronx Better Learning demonstrate positive behavior in the school. They politely greet the visitors they meet in hallways and file silently as they move to their next class. Finally, school leaders provide targeted professional development designed to help teachers improve the way in which they deliver instruction. This is evidence that the principal and executive director understand that the quality of instruction impacts student behavior. They are working very hard to have their teachers become skilled instructional leaders who will employ a variety of strategies to engage and motivate the youngsters in their charge.

Despite the unevenness in the overall quality of instruction, there is ample evidence of planning on the part of teachers. Class observations and conversations with the staff clearly indicate that they are aligning their lessons with the New York State standards. A review of student portfolios shows that teachers are trying to incorporate academic rigor in their assignments. Students have to respond to a variety of questions in which they have to demonstrate and/or explain their understanding of a particular concept. An examination of the mid-year mathematics assessment reveals that it consists of open-ended questions only. The Title I director informed the team that this was intentionally done because students' responses to the open-ended questions provide the staff with explicit information about the progress that students are making toward grade level benchmarks in mathematics. Furthermore, it supports the school's mission to create independent, critical thinkers.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

QUESTION 1: Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

1. Both parents and students indicated they were highly satisfied with all aspects of the school.

In an interview with members of the inspection team, parents reported that they are especially pleased with Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. They noted that the school is student-centered and has an open door policy that makes it possible for them to communicate easily with both school leaders and teachers. The parents appreciate the timely updates they receive about their children's progress, as well as about school-wide events. They like the small class size. They believe this makes it possible for teachers to provide one-on-one support to students and contributes to the orderliness and sense of safety that students experience while they are in the school. Most importantly, all six parents interviewed strongly believe that the school is preparing their children to become competent, independent thinkers who can achieve academic and personal success. As such, they are very supportive of the school's goal to provide their children with a nurturing environment for learning.

Conversations with school leaders and a review of school documents show that parent and community support for Bronx Better Learning makes the school a viable option for families. In March 2006, school leaders reported that there were 400 applications for 54 slots for the 2006-

2007 school year. The nine students who were interviewed by the team reported that they feel safe and that their teachers care about them and are willing to help them whenever they have difficulty with an assignment.

QUESTION 2: Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

1. There is ample evidence to show the staff at Bronx Better Learning is committed to continuous improvement and has put processes in place to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

School leaders have established systems and processes to evaluate the efficacy of the school's academic program. School leaders have a well-defined teacher performance appraisal process. The Board of Trustees has refined the way in which it evaluates the performance of both the principal and the executive director. Also, school leaders implement a system that allows them to collect, analyze and use student performance data to make strategic decisions about curriculum and instruction and additional instructional support to students.

Teachers reported that they receive frequent informal observations from the principal, executive director, mathematics and ELA consultants, and the Title I teacher (who is also responsible for providing staff development in the school). It appears that the primary purpose of these informal observations is to monitor teachers' use of effective behavior management strategies, as well as their implementation of the strategies associated with the Subordination of Teaching to Learning methodology. Based on classroom observations and conversations with staff and administrators, the inspection team concluded that the consultants, staff developer and executive director serve as critical friends, who offer timely and constructive feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. The teachers reported that, during the informal observations, the observer – whether it is the staff developer or consultant – would sometimes demonstrate a model lesson for them. They say that they find this very helpful because it provides them with a concrete example of how they should execute certain strategies in their classes.

Teachers interviewed noted that, annually, they receive three formal observations. A review of the documents associated with the formal teacher performance appraisal process reveals that teachers are required to participate in pre- and post-observation conferences with the executive director, who conducts the formal evaluations. In addition, they have to complete a pre-observation worksheet in which they outline the lesson that they plan to conduct at the time of the performance appraisal. Successful completion of the pre-observation worksheet consists of teachers' clearly outlining the curriculum performance indicators, planned activities and planned techniques that are associated with the lesson to be observed.

An examination of a completed teacher evaluation form shows that, rather than using a rubric that has well-defined performance indicators, school leaders use a narrative format to provide the teachers with comments about their performance. While the feedback to the teacher was good, it was not specific enough to help him/her improve his/her practice as a teacher or become more proficient in the Gattegno approach. For example, the reviewer made the following statement, "There was ample evidence of careful preparation for the lesson." However, he did

not describe the specific things he saw that allowed him to arrive at this conclusion. Also, the evaluator did not provide explicit comments on the teacher's implementation of the Gattegno approach to instruction. This is significant because school leaders acknowledge that many teachers find it challenging to become proficient in the instructional approach that is the bedrock of the school's academic program. One would assume, therefore, that this would be a key component of the teacher performance appraisal process. Consequently, it was not clear which steps the teacher should take to become more proficient in the use of the Gattegno methodology.

In the past, the Board of Trustees used a very generic tool to evaluate the performance of the principal. They have since revised it, however, and have created a rubric that has clear performance indicators. According to the Board members who were interviewed by the inspection team, they are in the process of developing a modified version of the evaluation rubric to be used in the evaluation of the executive director – a new position they created to provide oversight and leadership of the school's academic program.

The newly-revised evaluation rubric has the following broad categories: Strong Instructional Leadership-Improving Teaching & Learning; Rigorous Academic Assessment & Teaching; Caring Culture of Commitment; Operations & Financials; and, Good Governance. There are key components to each broad category. For example, the key components of the category on Instructional Leadership are assessment and coherent curriculum and instruction, while those under Caring Culture of Commitment are high academic expectations, personal attention and caring, discipline and order. This new rubric is certainly better than the one used in the past because it has clear performance indicators that the Board can use to provide school leaders with specific information about their performance in achieving school-wide goals and objectives. Nonetheless, it is not clear if the members of the Board of Trustees have been trained on how to use the rubric.

There is ample evidence to show that school leaders at Bronx Better Learning are actively engaged in data-driven decision making to improve curriculum and instruction in the school. School leaders create Excel worksheets on which to collect and analyze student performance on both internal and external assessments. They examine, for example, the performance of grade level and matched cohorts of students on the TerraNova subtests. The Title I teacher conducts an extensive item analysis of the mid-year mathematics assessment data to identify the specific areas in which students have made progress, as well as those in which they still need to improve. (School leaders recently initiated the use of an interim mathematics assessment in an effort to bolster the way in which they monitor students' academic progress.) School leaders shared copies of the Excel worksheets with team members and informed them that they provide similar copies to classroom teachers. Apparently, teachers and administrators use the data to brainstorm strategies for supporting struggling learners (e.g., who should receive Title I support) as well as for discussion in the Pupil Assistance Team meetings. They also use the information to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction in the school. This is evident in the fact that school leaders have encouraged teachers to use a variety of instructional materials to supplement the Words in Color program, as well as the mathematics program. Conversations with teachers indicate that they do receive reports on student performance on ongoing internal assessments. Team members, however, did not see teachers referring to them at the time of the visit.

As noted earlier, school leaders are aware of the challenges many teachers face with the implementation of the Gattegno approach to delivering instruction and, as such, have put systems and processes in place to support their professional development in this area. The ELA and mathematics consultants and Title 1 teacher – who are all very familiar with the approach – work constantly with teachers to help them grow. They also provide push-in/pull-out support for students and, as well, model exemplary strategies for teachers. To further support the professional development of the teachers at Bronx Better Learning, school administrators created daily schedules that provide grade-level teachers with common planning time, which they are expected to use to discuss curriculum and instruction. During the two-day visit, a team member attended one of the grade-level meetings. The three third grade teachers met with the Title 1 teacher to review how their lessons on fractions went with students. They discussed what worked and what did not work, as well as the particular challenges they had with certain students in their classes. The teachers shared the strategies they used to support students and all asked their colleagues for help. They used the time to brainstorm additional instructional strategies for supporting the students in the classroom. They used the opportunity to plan their lessons. The conversation was very rich and focused on helping students achieve academic success.

The teachers spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities they have to plan together and to observe each other teach. This is an apparent effort to bring some uniformity to the way in which teaching and learning are implemented in the school. The professional climate at Bronx Better Learning seems to support individual teacher's professional development. At the grade-level meeting, it was clear that the teachers are accustomed to giving each other constructive feedback about how to improve their practice.

Evidence indicates that members of the Board of Trustees are using data to refine the organizational structure of the school. Based on feedback from the principal, the Board made the decision to create the executive director position in an effort to strengthen the leadership structure in the school. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning now has a principal (who is responsible for the operations and management of the school) and an executive director (who provides instructional leadership). By all accounts, the newly-revised organizational structure works well. The executive director and principal are able to focus on all the key issues that are essential to making the school operate efficiently, and to improving student learning and achievement.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

QUESTION 1: Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

- 1. Although many stakeholders could not articulate the school's mission verbatim, they have internalized the school's commitment to help students become independent thinkers.**

In conversations with team members, parents, teachers, board members and administrators, all spoke enthusiastically about Bronx Better Learning's purpose to provide students with unique learning opportunities that are instrumental in their development as independent thinkers. They also expressed clear understanding and support for the school's adherence to the belief system of empowering students to control and manage their own learning. The various stakeholders describe the supportive environment that the school provides for students, families and staff. According to them, Bronx Better Learning's mission is what makes it a special and viable alternative to traditional public schools in the Bronx. Parents asserted that Bronx Better Learning has been successful in helping their children love school and that it is preparing them for life.

QUESTION 2: Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?

- 1. Bronx Charter School for Better Learning currently does not have unique aspects goals in its Accountability Plan.**

The unique programmatic areas of Bronx Better Learning are embedded in the school's use of the Subordination of Teaching to Learning approach to deliver curriculum and instruction. The strengths and challenges associated with this instructional approach are addressed under the questions that deal with the school's academic success and organizational viability.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS

Goal 1: All Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will become proficient readers and writers of the English language.

Measure 1: For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 65% of third graders who have been enrolled for two or more years and 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled for three or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State English language arts (ELA) Assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percentage of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students, enrolled for at least three years, at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's ELA test will exceed the percentage of students on Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test at the following three comparison public schools: P.S. 153X (Helen Keller School); P.S. 108X (Philip J. Abinanti School); P.S. 178X (Selman Waksman School). The percentage of all similarly enrolled Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's ELA test will exceed that of New York City's Region 2, as a whole.

Measure 3: For the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, cohorts of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will either reduce by one half the gap between their baseline performance and grade level on the TerraNova reading assessment, or they will exceed an average NCE of 50 if their baseline average NCE exceeded 50. The second grade will either reduce by one half the gap between its average NCE score on the first grade TerraNova reading assessment and an NCE of 50, or it will exceed an average of 50 if its first grade average NCE exceeded 50. The third grade will either reduce by one half the gap between its average NCE score on the second grade TerraNova reading assessment and an NCE of 50, or it will exceed an average NCE of 50 if its second grade average NCE exceeded 50.

Goal 2: All Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will demonstrate mastery of grade level mathematical concepts.

Measure 1: For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 65% of third graders who have been enrolled for two or more years and 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled for three or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State mathematics assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percentage of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students, enrolled for at least three years, at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's mathematics test will exceed the percentage of students on Levels 3 and 4 on the state's mathematics test at the following three comparison public schools: P.S. 153X (Helen Keller School); P.S. 108X (Philip J. Abinanti School); P.S. 178X (Selman Waksman School). The percentage of all similarly enrolled Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's mathematics test will exceed that of New York City's Region 2, as a whole.

Measure 3: For the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, cohorts of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will either reduce by one half the gap between their baseline performance and grade level on the TerraNova mathematics assessment, or they will exceed an average NCE of 50 if their baseline average NCE exceeded 50. The second grade will either reduce by one half the gap between its average NCE score on the first grade TerraNova mathematics assessment and an NCE of 50, or it will exceed an average of 50 if its first grade average NCE exceeded 50. The third grade will either reduce by one half the gap between its average NCE score on the second grade TerraNova mathematics assessment and an NCE of 50, or it will exceed an average NCE of 50 if its second grade average NCE exceeded 50.

Goal 3: All Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.

Measure 1: For the 2006-2007 and 2007-08 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning for three or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State science assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percentage of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students, enrolled for at least three years, at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test will exceed the percentage of students on Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test at the following three comparison public schools: P.S. 153X (Helen Keller School); P.S. 108X (Philip J. Abinanti School); P.S. 178X (Selman Waksman School). The percentage of all similarly enrolled Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test will exceed that of New York City's Region 2, as a whole.

Goal 4: All Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of social studies concepts.

Measure 1: Using the NYSTROM Exploring Where and Why Curricula, 75% of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning grade level cohorts will pass the end-of-unit, multiple-choice or other unambiguously scored tests each year in grades 1 through 4 for the "People, Past and Present," "Human Interdependence," "Citizenship and Government" and "People and Where They Live" components of the social studies domain.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

The school might consider the following recommendations to enhance the quality of evidence to be used to assess progress toward its goals.

1. Clearly label all tables and charts. Include the name of the assessment on which the school is reporting, as well as the testing period. Indicate if the school is reporting on grade level or matched cohort results.
2. Create tables and charts for individual grade levels. Also, write a narrative that analyzes the results for each grade level. This will make it easier for the reader to get a complete picture of overall student performance.

3. When reporting TerraNova value-added results, create tables that include information on the target/expected results, as well as the actual results. Also, include a column to show Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) gains and/or losses. This makes it easier for the reader to understand the progress the school is making towards the goals outlined in its Accountability Plan.
4. By disaggregating test scores into subgroups, classrooms and other local criteria, a more complete picture of students' overall performance on internal assessments and standardized tests is available. Using the data, the school would be able to adjust its academic program and instructional practice to better address the needs of high-achieving and struggling students.

APPENDIX A: Framework for the Analysis of School Progress

Category	Criteria	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	To what extent have students attained expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?	School's Accountability Plan and Progress Report(s)
	Does the school's instructional program meet the needs of diverse students?	Class visits, interviews, data review, Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Do the school's standards reflect the implementation of high academic expectations?	Review of curriculum documents, student work samples ; confirmation of implementation by class visits
Organizational Viability	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey review
	Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?	Personnel evaluation policies, minutes and agendas of board, staff meetings
Unique Aspects	Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?	Interviews, document reviews
	Are the school's special programs meeting expected targets?	Accountability Plan, Progress Reports, other docs unique to each school

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Bronx Charter School for Better Learning

I. Academic Program Goals

<p>Goals 1& 2: All students at Bronx Charter School for Better Learning will become proficient readers and writers of the English language and demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of mathematical computation and problem solving.</p>	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
<p>Measure 1: For the 2005-2006 through 2007-2008 school years, 65% of third graders who have been enrolled for two or more years and 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled for three or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State ELA and mathematics assessments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label all tables and charts clearly. • Label charts and tables to show if they contain grade level or matched cohort data. • When reporting TerraNova value-added results, create tables that include information on the target/expected results, as well as the actual results. Also, include a column to show NCE gains and/or losses. • Create tables and charts for individual grade level. • Write a narrative for each data chart/table.
<p>Measure 2: Each year, the percentage of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students, enrolled for at least three years, at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's ELA test will exceed the percentage of students on Levels 3 and 4 on the state's ELA and mathematics assessments.</p>	
<p>Measure 3: For the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, cohorts of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students will either reduce by one half the gap between their baseline performance and grade level on the TerraNova reading assessment or they will exceed an average NCE of 50 if their baseline average NCE exceeded 50...</p>	
<p>Goals 3: All Bronx charter school for Better Learning students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of scientific reasoning.</p>	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
<p>Measure 1: For the 2006-2007 and 2007-08 school years, 75 % of fourth graders who have been enrolled at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning for three or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label all tables and charts clearly. • Label charts and tables to show if they contain grade level or matched cohort data. • Create tables and charts for individual grade level. • Write a narrative for each data chart/table.
<p>Measure 2: Each year, the percentage of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning students, enrolled for at least three years, at Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test will exceed the percentage of students on Levels 3 and 4 on the state's science test at the following comparison public schools...</p>	

Goal 4: All Bronx charter school for Better Learning students will demonstrate competency in the understanding and application of social studies concepts.	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations for the school to consider:</i>
<p>Measure 1: Using the NYSTROM Exploring Where and Why Curricula, 75% of all Bronx Charter School for Better Learning grade level cohorts will pass the end-of-unit, multiple-choice or other unambiguously scored tests each year in grades 1 through 4 for the “People, Past and Present,” “Human Interdependence,” “Citizenship and Government” and “People and Where They Live” components of the social studies domain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label all tables and charts clearly. • Label charts and tables to show if they contain grade level or matched cohort data. • Create tables and charts for individual grade level. • Write a narrative for each data chart/table.