



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

BROOKLYN EXCELSIOR CHARTER SCHOOL THIRD YEAR INSPECTION REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

The third year inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for charter schools authorized by the State University of New York Board of Trustees. 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 Charter Schools Institute staff and corroborates 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 guidance for enhancing the evidence base for its renewal application.

II. CONDUCT OF VISIT

The inspection of the Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School was conducted on May 9-12, 2006 by an independent team of experienced educators from RMC Research, New York, NY.

- **Tom Buffett**, Consultant, RMC Research: Tom taught 6th grade in California, served as a Change Coach in the Boston Public Schools, taught graduate-level courses on Action Research and School Leadership, and led numerous school inspections in a variety of accountability contexts.
- **Jenny Scala**, Research Associate, RMC Research: Jenny designed and implemented team building initiatives to middle and high school students in California, served as a tutor to high school English Language Learners, and crafted and delivered math and English Language Arts content curriculum training to volunteers in Boston Public Schools.
- **Adam Tanney**, Research Associate, RMC Research: Adam taught 11th and 12th grade history in New Hampshire, consulted for a Boston pilot high school, conducted educational research for the United States Education Department, and provides technical assistance and strategy consultation to state education agencies, institutes of higher education, and non-profit education providers.

- **Joe Trunk**, Research Associate, RMC Research Corporation. Joe was a Middle School Principal and Deputy Superintendent in the U. S. Virgin Islands. He also developed and implemented parent involvement programs as a member of the New York Comprehensive Center. He is now involved in researching and advising on parent involvement issues related to the No Child Left Behind Act.

The team used the school's accountability plan goals as the guide for its 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 three-day visit, the team reviewed the school's documents, including its *Accountability Plan Progress Report*, its original charter application, and reports from previous site visits by the 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 (see Appendix A for a list of documents reviewed and people interviewed).

This report is organized into 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 B

The second section, *Part II: School Accountability Plan—Assessments and Recommendations*, reports 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 C.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (herein, "Brooklyn Excelsior") opened its doors with 210 students in kindergarten through 4th grades in September 2003. The school grew substantially in its second year, enrolling 482 students in the fall of 2004 in grades K-5.

In 2005-06, the school had 563 students in grades K-6 and plans to expand to a K-7 school in 2006-07.

Brooklyn Excelsior is located at 856 Quincy Street in Brooklyn, New York in a four-story brick building purchased by its management organization, the National Heritage Academies (NHA). The well-lit school building includes a good-sized library/media center, ample space for administrative offices and room to grow. Grade levels are organized by floor, with the kindergarten occupying the lower level, the 1st and 2nd grades on the first floor (along with the school library/media center, the administrative offices and a parent room), 3rd and 4th grades on the second floor (along with a teacher's lounge, a special education room for primary grades and rooms for a reading specialist, social worker and family advocate), and the 5th and 6th grades on the third floor (in addition to a special education room for the upper grades, and rooms for another reading specialist, the Assistant Principal, Director of Instruction, Music and Art).

Classrooms at Brooklyn Excelsior range considerably in size, are brightly lit and well-resourced. Every classroom has two computers for students and one for the teacher. The walls are well-decorated with commercial materials and student work. Every classroom has the alphabet above a dry-erase whiteboard, vocabulary words from the current Open Court unit, and a desk for every student.

Brooklyn Excelsior's Board of Trustees has hired NHA to manage the school's educational and financial operations. NHA is responsible for providing curriculum and instructional support; measuring and reporting student's academic progress, and maintaining a focus on high academic achievement, parent involvement and character education. NHA provides teachers and administrators with professional development, both on and off-site, on a variety of topics including curriculum implementation, classroom management, and use of its academic software.

For the 2005-06 school year, the school employed 24 classroom teachers and six paraprofessionals, mostly deployed in the primary grades. The school hired specialist teachers for art, music and physical education, and had a teacher devoted to teaching writing and moral focus (recently re-assigned from teaching 5th grade). In addition to a nurse, the school employs a social worker, two reading specialists, two special education teachers, two secretaries and three retired teachers designated to provide in-class instructional support. The school's Parent Handbook invites parents to volunteer to help the school in a variety of ways that include providing in-class support to teachers.

Brooklyn Excelsior's administrative team has undergone several changes since the school started, and was on its third principal in as many years. At the time of the inspection visit, the coach to the previous principal had been serving as the acting principal for approximately one month. The school administrator with the longest tenure, the Assistant Principal, was hired in September 2005. With the recent departure of the school's second principal, NHA provided a transition team that included a Special Assistant to the Acting Principal, an Instructional Specialist (also known as the Director of Instruction) and an Instructional Support Advisor. Members of the school's Board of

Trustees reported that the leadership team would be in place through the remainder of the 2005-06 school year, and that the Board is currently conducting a search for the new principal. The seven-member Board of Trustees is responsible for providing fiscal and policy oversight, evaluating NHA and the school principal, and monitoring the academic program and fulfillment of the school mission.

PART I: SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

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

- 1. State test scores from 2004 and 2005 indicate that Brooklyn Excelsior fourth graders, despite notable gains in mathematics, remain well below expected targets in ELA, math, and science. Similarly, a substantial number of fifth grade students are not meeting state learning standards in social studies. (Please note that state assessment scores for 2006 were not available at the time of the school inspection or prior to the issuance of this report.)**

Table 1: Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School 2004 and 2005 State 4th Grade ELA, Math and Science Test Scores, Percent of Students Scoring at each Performance Level

	Performance Levels			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
ELA				
January 2004 (n=39)	15%	56%	26%	3%
January 2005 (n=65)	5%	65%	28%	3%
January 2005 2+ yr cohort (n=35 ^a)	11%	66%	20%	3%
Mathematics				
May 2004 (n=38)	16%	61%	24%	0%
May 2005 (n=65)	8%	37%	52%	3%
May 2005 2+ yr cohort (n=32 ^b)	5%	27%	59%	6%
Science				
May 2004 (n=37)	19%	46%	32%	3%
May 2005 (n=65)	8%	49%	40%	3%

^a From 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report.

^b From the school's 2004-05 Excel Workbook, submitted as an addendum to the Accountability Plan Progress Report.

According to Brooklyn Excelsior's Accountability Plan, the school expects that 75% of fourth grade students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level 3 on the New York state assessments in ELA, Mathematics and Science. In ELA, the percentage of students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 was 29% and 31% (in 2004 and 2005 respectively), and was actually lower for students who had been enrolled for at least two years in 2005 (23%). In mathematics, while only 24% of

students met the school's target in 2004, 55% scored at Levels 3 and 4 in 2005, a substantial increase. The school reported that 65% of students enrolled at the school for two or more years scored at Levels 3 and 4 in 2005. Unlike in ELA, students in the school for two or more years performed better in math than those in the school for less time.

Finally, 35% and 43% of students met the school's performance target in science in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Overall, despite making substantial gains in mathematics on the 2005 state exams, the school had not met its performance targets in ELA, math or science, and its ELA scores for the second year in a row remained disturbingly low.

Table 2: Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School 2005 State 5th Grade Social Studies Test Scores, Percent of Students Scoring at each Performance Level

	Performance Levels ^a			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Social Studies				
November 2005 (n=37)	19%	46%	33%	3%
2+ year cohort (n=29)	28%	24%	45%	3%

^a Data from Brooklyn Excelsior's 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report.

According to Brooklyn Excelsior's Accountability Plan, the school expects that 75% of fifth grade students who have been enrolled at the school for two or more years will perform at or above Level three on the New York state assessments in social studies. In 2004-05, 36% of fifth grade students scored at Levels 3 and 4; of the students who had been enrolled at the school for two or more years, 48% met the performance target. The school did not meet its performance target in social studies.

2. Based on state requirements, the school has made Adequate Yearly Progress in ELA, Mathematics and Science for each of the past two years.

Table 3: Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) 2003-04 & 2004-05, English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics

(source: NYSED website)

	Participation		Performance	Standards
	Gr. 4 Enrollment ^a	% Tested	Performance Index ^b	Effective AMO ^c
ELA				
2003-04	39	100% ^d	113	107
2004-05	66	98%	125	119
Mathematics				
2003-04	38	100% ^d	108	120
2004-05	65	100%	146	130

^a Brooklyn Excelsior had no student subgroup large enough to be included in the AYP analysis. Thus, the school's AYP status is based on the performance of All Students.

^b Based on the distribution of continuously enrolled students scoring at the four performance levels on the state test, the Performance Index ranges between 0 and 200 and serves as a proxy for overall school performance within English language arts, mathematics or science.

^c Established by the state, the Effective AMO, or Annual Measurable Objective, the Performance Index value each accountability group needs to achieve to make AYP. However, the Charter Schools Institute expects all University-authorized charter schools to meet each year's AMO standard. It also considers making AYP through either Safe Harbor or *Effective* AMO in the context of schools' being in Good Standing according to the state's NCLB accountability system.

^d Calculated based on state reported results (but not included in Accountability Plan Progress Report).

The results in Table 3 show that Brooklyn Excelsior exceeded participation and state-defined performance targets in English language arts (ELA) in each of the past two years. Brooklyn Excelsior exceeded the 95% participation requirement on the state exam given in Spring 2005 by three percentage points in ELA; in Spring, 2004, all enrolled students completed the exam. The school made AYP in 2004-05 as it achieved a Performance Index (PI) of 125, six points more than its Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO). In 2003-04, it made AYP with a PI of 113, again six points higher than its Effective AMO. Thus, in both years of operation, the school made the state's designated AYP goal in ELA.

In math, Brooklyn Excelsior exceeded participation targets each year, and made AYP in 2004-05 by achieving a PI 16 points higher than its Effective AMO. Although in 2003-04 its PI was less than its Effective AMO, Brooklyn Excelsior made AYP in 2003-04 in mathematics by meeting its Safe Harbor target (for an explanation of the Safe Harbor provision of *No Child Left Behind*, see <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/accountability/home.shtml>).

Table 4: Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School Results on the State Science Test in Comparison to the State Standard

	Participation	Performance	Standards
	Continuously Enrolled Students	Performance Index	State Science Standard
Science			
2003-04	37	116	100
2004-05	63	135	100

The results in Table 4 illustrate that Brooklyn Excelsior made AYP in science in 2003-04 and in 2004-05. In 2003-04, its PI of 116 surpassed the state standard of 100; in 2004-05, its PI of 135 surpassed the state standard by an even greater margin.

3. Two years of test scores indicate that a smaller percentage of Brooklyn Excelsior students are meeting the New York State learning standards in ELA than in the comparison schools in its School Accountability Plan, and

that, overall, students outperform at most two out of five comparison schools in any subject area in either 2004 or 2005.

Table 5: Comparison of Brooklyn Excelsior to Selected New York City Schools and Region 8 on State Assessments in ELA and Math, According to the Percentage of Students Scoring at Levels 3 and 4

Schools and Region	Percentage of Students Scoring at Level 3 and 4 (total students tested)			
	ELA (4 th grade)		Mathematics (4 th grade)	
	2004	2005	2004	2005
PS # 114	26% (156)	38% (97)	44% (194)	53% (155)
PS # 115	71% (79)	89% (89)	86% (71)	95% (97)
PS # 279	25% (144)	41% (91)	53% (152)	67% (116)
PS # 189	60% (121)	77% (107)	78% (136)	87% (118)
PS # 308	43% (106)	36% (123)	53% (103)	44% (122)
Region 8	49% (6406)	58% (5726)	41% (5466)	39% (5366)
BECS	29% (39)	31% (65)	24% (38)	55% (65)

Data sources: www.nycenet.edu and www.nysed.gov.

Table 6: Comparison of Brooklyn Excelsior to Selected New York City Schools and Region 8 Scores on State Assessments in Science and Social Studies, According to the Percentage of Students Scoring at Levels 3 and 4

Schools and Region	Percentage of Students Scoring at Level 3 and 4 (total students tested)			
	Science (4 th grade)		Social Studies (5 th grade)	
	2004	2005	2004	2005
PS # 114	56%	62%	55%	65%
PS # 115	65%	71%	61%	76%
PS # 279	81%	75%	71%	78%
PS # 189	75%	89%	61%	53%
PS # 308	41%	38%	45%	42%
Region 8	58%	62%	37%	unavailable
BECS	35%	43%	unavailable	36%

Data sources: Brooklyn Excelsior's 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report and www.nycenet.edu.

According to Brooklyn Excelsior's Accountability Plan, the school expects that a higher percentage of its students will score at Levels 3 and 4 than five selected New York City Schools as well as Region 8 in ELA, math, science, and social studies. As indicated in Table 5, in ELA in 2004, 29% of Brooklyn Excelsior 4th grade students scored in Levels 3 and 4. While this represents a much smaller percentage than in Region 8 (49%), it was greater than PS 114 (26%) and PS 279 (25%). In 2005, although Brooklyn Excelsior increased the percentage of 4th grade students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 in ELA to 31%, this figure is less than any of the comparison schools and Region 8. In math in 2004, 24% of Brooklyn Excelsior students scored in Levels 3 and 4, a figure less than any of the comparison schools and Region 8. In 2005, Brooklyn Excelsior increased the

percentage of students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 in math to 55%, a figure greater than Region 8 (39%), PS 114 (53%) and PS 308 (44%).¹

As indicated in Table 6, 35% of Brooklyn Excelsior 4th grade students scored at Levels 3 and 4 on the state test in science in 2004. This figure is below all comparison schools and Region 8. In 2005, 43% of Brooklyn Excelsior 4th grade students scored in Levels 3 and 4 in science, a figure less than Region 8 and all of the comparison schools except PS 308. In social studies, 36% of Brooklyn Excelsior 5th grade students scored at Levels 3 and 4 in 2005, a figure less than all comparison schools.

4. Results from the most recent administration of the school's nationally normed test indicate that most students have reached grade level proficiency in ELA and fewer than half have done so in math.

Table 7: Results from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)'s Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), Median Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) by Grade, ELA and Mathematics

Grade	MAP, Median NCEs					
	ELA			Mathematics		
	Spring 2004	Spring 2005	Winter 2006	Spring 2004	Spring 2005	Winter 2006
2	50.0	47.1	53.2	50.5	52.6	44.7
3	43.0	40.7	51.6	42.5	44.1	50.5
4	36.5	37.7	50.5	39.6	36.5	46.3
5		46.3	46.8		42.5	44.1
6			53.4			46.0

Data provided by NHA during inspection visit.

Brooklyn Excelsior students in grades two through six take the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA's) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test three times a year in ELA and math. Table 7 above shows the results from the spring administrations of the MAP in 2004 and 2005, and the winter administration for 2006 (the most recent administration at the time of the inspection visit). Based on the median Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)—where a score of 50 indicates performing at grade level, as defined by the norming sample of the MAP test—fewer than half of the students reached grade level in ELA in 2005 in each grade tested. In 2004 only the 2nd grade's median score was at grade level. In contrast, the most recent administration indicates that more than half of the students in each grade have reached grade level in 2006, with the exception of the 5th grade. In math, at least half of students reached grade level in one of three classes in 2004 (the 2nd grade) and, in 2005, one of four grades met this mark (again the 2nd grade). However, the most recent administration of the MAP in math indicates that more than

¹ This similar schools comparison is based on the measure BECS set for itself in its Accountability Plan. The Institute examines other comparative data, as well, including a regression analysis. As the comparative measure included in its Accountability Plan, the similar schools analysis remains an important indicator of school success.

half of students have reached grade level in only one of five grades. Achieving grade level on the MAP is an indication that students have a level of skill and knowledge comparable to a national sample of students at that grade level. It does not necessarily mean that they have mastered the content necessary to reach proficiency on state learning standards. Based on interviews with school administrators and NHA representatives, determining the relationship between the MAP and the state standards, in the words of one respondent, is a “work in progress.”

QUESTION 2: What progress have students made over time in attaining expected skills and knowledge?

- 1. The school has not yet met its goals on the value-added measures contained in its Accountability Plan. However, based on the most recent administration of the school’s nationally normed test, the majority of students have met the NWEA growth targets.**

In its Accountability Plan, Brooklyn Excelsior states the value-added measure as having student cohorts “reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level” in both reading and math with the further condition that if a cohort’s average baseline NCE score exceeds 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score. The school measures progress toward this goal by converting MAP scores into median NCEs for each cohort in reading and math. Table 8 shows the median NCEs for three cohorts of Brooklyn Excelsior students: students who were in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade in spring 2004.

Table 8: Brooklyn Excelsior’s Results from the NWEA’s MAP, Cohort Analysis of 2004-05 Gains in Median NCEs, Reading and Mathematics²

	NWEA Results for Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School		
	Median NCE in Spring 2004		
	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
Reading			
Spring 2004	50	42.5	36.5
Spring 2005 (target)	43.6 (50.1)	40.1 (46.2)	46.3 (43.3)
Change	-6.4	-2.4	9.8
Met Target?	No	No	Yes
Mathematics			
Spring 2004	50.5	42.5	39.6
Spring 2005 (target)	45.7 (50.6)	36.5 (46.2)	43.6 (44.8)

² This table follows directly from Table 7 which contains the scores of all students who took particular administrations of the tests. This table provides scores only for cohorts of students (defined as students with scores for *both* spring 2004 and spring 2005 administrations).

Change	-4.8	-6.0	4.0
Met Target?	No	No	No

Data source: Brooklyn Excelsior 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report

Second Grade Cohort

The group of students who were in the 2nd grade in spring 2004 had a median NCE of 50 in reading. Moving down Table 8, you can see that the median NCEs for the same group of students was 43.6 in spring 2005, a decline of 6.4 NCEs. Similarly, while this group's baseline median NCE was 50.5 in math, a year later its median NCE declined to 45.7. Thus, for the cohort of students who were in the 2nd grade in spring 2004, Brooklyn Excelsior did not meet the performance goal in its Accountability Plan in either reading or math—these students' performance on the MAP went down.

Third Grade Cohort

Students who were in the 3rd grade in spring 2004 had a median NCE of 42.5 in reading. Moving down Table 8, you can see that the median NCEs for these students was 40.1 in spring 2005, a decline of 2.4 NCEs. Similarly, while this group's baseline median NCE was 42.5 in math as well, a year later their median NCE declined to 36.5. Thus, for the cohort of students who were in the 3rd grade in spring 2004, Brooklyn Excelsior did not meet the performance goal in its Accountability Plan in either reading or math—these students' performance on the MAP went down.

Fourth Grade Cohort

Students who were in the 4th grade in spring 2004 had a median NCE of 36.5 in reading. Moving down Table 8, you can see that the median NCEs for these students was 46.3 in spring 2005, a gain of nearly 10 NCEs. In reading, this group more than reduced the gap between the baseline and grade (reducing the gap halfway required the group to have a median NCE of 43). In math, students in the 4th grade in spring 2004 had a median NCE of 39.6. A year later, the cohort median NCE went up to 43.6. While this change represents growth, it falls short of reaching the school's Accountability Plan goal, which would have required the cohort to achieve a median NCE of 44.8. Thus, the cohort's performance on the MAP went up in both reading and math, and Brooklyn Excelsior met its Accountability Plan performance goal in reading but not in math.

Overall, Brooklyn Excelsior met its value-added growth target in reading for one of three student cohorts. For math, Brooklyn Excelsior did not meet its expected growth target for any student cohort.

QUESTION 3: Does the school's instructional program meet the diverse needs of students?

- 1. Brooklyn Excelsior has created literacy programs and provided teachers some support to meet the diverse needs of students. While the school has assembled several tools and created various structures to support classroom**

instruction, it does not yet have a coherent and consistent approach to improving the quality of instruction.

At the time of its inspection visit, Brooklyn Excelsior had created various structures and programs to support instruction. However, based on individual teacher interviews, focus group feedback and interviews with school administrators, the school's staff did not have a commonly understood approach to improving the quality of instruction. Teachers' and administrators' understanding of the purpose of the programs and how they fit together varied significantly, and there was a marked difference between administrators' and teachers' reports on the frequency and depth of program implementation. A brief discussion of these structures and programs follow.

In order to meet diverse student needs, Brooklyn Excelsior had implemented a number of literacy programs designed to provide targeted support to students with specific learning needs. For 45 minutes each day during Reading Enhancement, students in grades 3-6 were placed in groups with similar instructional needs. The school deployed three specialists to lower the student to teacher ratio. School administrators reported that the groups— comprised of students from the same grade but different homeroom teachers— were established using results from the NWEA assessments.

In addition to Reading Enhancement, several K-2 teachers reported using scheduled workshop time to provide additional support to struggling students. The team observed paraprofessionals providing individual support to students in kindergarten and 1st grade classrooms. Outside of Reading Enhancement and workshop time in Brooklyn Excelsior's heterogeneous classrooms, inspectors' classroom observations and interview data indicated that teachers were largely responsible for providing instruction to meet students' diverse learning needs. Operation Breakthrough, an intervention described in the Brooklyn Excelsior Charter Application, was not in operation at the school.

Brooklyn Excelsior used a combination of pull-out and in-class interventions to support the 28 students who had Individualized Education Programs. The school retained two full time resource room teachers and two full-time paraprofessionals that provided special education services to these students. The school provided enrichment services through a pull-out program during the workshop period to 60 students identified at the beginning of the school year through testing and/or teacher recommendation.

The school had an after-school program that matched Brooklyn Excelsior students to students from a local high school. School administrators reported that this program provided reading and math support to 150 students in grades 2-6 from December 2005 through March 2006. The school also had an after-school reading program for 1st grade students run by the READ Foundation that was staffed by Brooklyn Excelsior teachers. According to school administrators, the 1st grade program served 30 students for two hours a day, Monday through Thursday, since February 2006.

Brooklyn Excelsior has recently retained three retired teachers who—according to the interim principal—were responsible for training teachers to use data to inform

instruction, model lessons and provide additional forms of instructional support. In interviews with inspectors, however, teachers rarely mentioned these individuals, and it was not evident that they viewed the recently retained retired teachers as an instructional resource. While several teachers reported that the Director of Instruction provided an important source of guidance and support (especially for Open Court), some were frustrated by his inconsistent presence in the school (he had responsibilities at another NHA school). Further, interviews with teachers and administrators indicate that teachers who were themselves relatively new to the profession were called upon to mentor teachers who were in their first year.

School administrators and a few teachers reported that learning how to differentiate instruction to meet students' diverse learning needs had been a professional development topic at Brooklyn Excelsior. Although it did not appear on the school's 2005-06 professional Development Plan, a few individuals reported participating in a session on differentiated instruction at a staff meeting after school. Several teachers indicated they would like to receive more help in this area.

2. While teachers used the vast majority of classroom time on academic instruction, its delivery was predominantly to whole groups with little evidence of differentiated instruction. Most student learning activities involved worksheets related to the school's curriculum.

In most lessons observed by inspectors, teachers devoted the vast majority of instructional time to academics. Overall, very little time was wasted on transitions or spent on non-academic subjects. Teachers clearly posted the learning objectives for each lesson and closely followed the school's master schedule.

During classroom observations almost all teachers taught in whole class formats using interactive direct instruction—teachers frequently posed questions to students, often in rapid-fire sequence. During the majority of observations, most students followed established classroom routines and appeared to be engaged in the lessons (although this was somewhat episodic, especially in the lower grades). Classroom interactions typically followed a teacher-student-teacher format, with very few instances of student-to-student discussion or the provision of individual student support.

Because of the whole class format, teachers had limited opportunity to provide additional instructional support to students with diverse learning needs. In all of the lessons observed by inspectors, teachers appeared to provide one level and one type of instruction to all students. In the majority of lessons observed, students were required to complete worksheets from Open Court or the math curriculum. In a sampling of student work folders, the team noted that of 230 ELA assignments, 162 (70%) involved worksheets. While the remaining assignments required students to write at least a paragraph, teacher feedback on students' completed work provided predominantly on one- or two-word commendations (e.g., "Nice work!") and focused on grammar (of the 68 writing assignments, the team found only 13 that included comments that probed students thinking and/or provided more detailed feedback).

All of the math assignments reviewed by the team required students to complete worksheets. While teachers reportedly provide additional support to students with specific needs at other times (e.g., during teachers' free periods and workshop time), the inspection team saw very little evidence of students working in small groups or of individual instruction or tutoring. Although inspectors noted at least two computers in each classroom, the team did not see any evidence that students worked on them (school administrators reported that the computers had only recently been installed at the time of the visit).

QUESTION 4: Is the curriculum based on high academic standards?

- 1. In general, teachers closely adhere to the school's curriculum in ELA and math and make efforts to link it to state standards. Connecting the school's curriculum to state standards remains a work in progress.**

Classroom observations³ and a review of lesson plans suggest that Brooklyn Excelsior teachers closely follow the school's ELA and math curricula, and are making efforts to link them to state standards by making explicit reference to them in their lesson plans. Teachers were observed to carefully follow the Open Court curriculum, and teacher interviews indicated that this is what school administrators expect them to do. One teacher noted, "If you do not follow it [Open Court] religiously, you won't get through it."

Representatives from the National Heritage Academies (NHA), Brooklyn Excelsior's management organization, reported that aligning the school's curriculum with state standards is a "work in progress." Whereas the Open Court ELA is more closely aligned with the state learning standards, the school's math curriculum, Saxon math in most grades (teachers in 1st and 4th grade currently use Real Math), is generally recognized as not being well aligned to the state standards to the extent that it does not focus on higher order thinking skills. Correspondingly, more teachers—especially those at the upper grades—reported supplementing Brooklyn Excelsior's math curriculum than did so for ELA. NHA reports that the curriculum in science is the most strongly aligned with state learning standards and that the school will change its social studies curriculum because it is not well aligned. The team found little evidence of efforts to articulate the curriculum across grades, although administrators reported some work of this being done in social studies.

QUESTION 5: To what extent do the school's systems or processes support its instructional staff to assist them in meeting student academic needs and school goals?

³The inspection team observed all 24 classroom teachers, sitting in on twelve math classes and twelve ELA classes for between 30 and 45 minutes each.

1. While Brooklyn Excelsior has instituted certain practices, teachers and administrators do not yet have a shared understanding of how to improve the quality of classroom instruction.

In order to provide professional support to Brooklyn Excelsior's relatively inexperienced teaching staff, the school had recently initiated grade level meetings. School administrators and a few teachers reported that grade level meetings provide a key source of professional support for Brooklyn Excelsior teachers. The school's schedule provides the opportunity for teachers from most grade levels to meet with each other for 45 minutes to plan lessons, provide other forms of professional support (e.g., administrators reported using grade level planning time to discuss the curriculum) and meet with parents. Specifically, Brooklyn Excelsior's master schedule provided five 45-minute blocks of time each week for 6th grade teachers to meet, four blocks for teachers in grades 3-5 and three for the 1st grade teachers. Although the kindergarten and 2nd grade schedules allowed for some common planning time among grade level teachers, there was no block during the school week where all of the teachers from these grades were able to meet. In addition to the scheduling challenges encountered at kindergarten and the 2nd grade, interviews with teachers at other grade levels suggested high variability regarding the consistency and utility of grade level meetings.

Brooklyn Excelsior has two instruments that administrators reported using to support classroom instruction: formal and informal observation forms. In addition, there is a monthly self-report for teachers in grades 4-6, which teachers indicated had not yet been implemented. The school's formal observation instrument, which administrators reported using twice a year to evaluate teachers, is a comprehensive evaluation tool that includes 89 yes-no questions organized within twelve topics (e.g., under Learning Objective the instrument includes such questions as "Is the learning objective definite and stated in behavioral terms?" "Is it adapted to the ability of the students?"). While the formal tool includes space for administrators to provide praise and suggestions for improvement, the inspection team was concerned that the instrument was too comprehensive to embody or engender a common understanding of what constitutes effective instruction. Notwithstanding administrator reports, interviews with teachers did not provide evidence of clearly established priorities within the school's framework for teacher evaluation and feedback. Brooklyn Excelsior's formal teacher evaluation instrument appeared to place equal value on all the various sections, leaving it up to individual teachers to establish their own priorities.

Brooklyn Excelsior's Informal Classroom Visit protocol is organized into four areas—Lesson, Structure, Resources, and Student Engagement in Learning—and also includes space for observation notes and recommendations. Although comments gathered on this form could be easily quantified, administrators did not share summary data related to informal observations. Further, interviews with administrators and teachers did not provide evidence that a shared understanding of the role informal observations play in instructional improvement and/or decision-making exists at Brooklyn Excelsior. The nature and type of feedback they described receiving varied substantially across teachers.

School administrators reported focusing more of their time and energy in the classrooms of teachers they considered in need.

When asked about the classroom support they receive, most teachers applauded administrators' responsiveness to their requests for instructional materials (e.g., math manipulatives), and several praised the efforts and help of the Director of Instruction. While teachers reported a recent increase in administrators' presence in their classrooms (coinciding with the change in principal leadership), no teachers mentioned the Informal Classroom Visit protocol cited by administrators. Thus, while Brooklyn Excelsior has several tools that administrators and teachers could use to craft a coherent and consistent approach to improving the quality of classroom instruction, teachers and administrators do not yet have a shared understanding of how the various structures and supports fit together.

- 2. Although school staff is clearly committed to students, the school has not yet been able to retain a stable cadre of teachers or administrators. Instability among staff and few opportunities to be involved in school decision-making have contributed to low teacher morale.**

Classroom observations revealed numerous examples of positive interactions between students and teachers, and many staff members clearly enjoy a good rapport with their students. Staff work long hours and many reported working with students during lunch and after school. Many teachers reported providing their cell phone number to parents—when asked how often she communicated with parents, one teacher responded “all the time.” When asked what they liked best about Brooklyn Excelsior, several staff responded, “the students.”

Staff turnover—administrators and teachers—has been a problem at Brooklyn Excelsior. The principal at the time of the visit was serving in an interim capacity, the third principal in as many years.

Teacher turnover is also a problem. Of the 24 individuals who were classroom teachers at the time of the inspection visit, only six were at Brooklyn Excelsior during the 2004-05 school year (a seventh had recently gone on maternity leave). More than half of Brooklyn Excelsior teachers were in their first year of teaching.

Teachers cited the staff instability, both among their teaching colleagues and school administrators, as a primary reason for low teacher morale. A second reason for low morale came from the lack of opportunities for teachers to be involved in decisions that would affect them (e.g., professional development offerings). During interviews teachers variously reported feeling expendable, “not valued” and “talked down to.”

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

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

- 1. While survey results suggest the majority of parents are satisfied, the school has not yet engaged parents as envisioned in the school's mission and key school documents.**

Table 9: Results from Parent Satisfaction Surveys, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06

	Parent Satisfaction ^a		
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06 ^b
Satisfaction	91.4%	96%	73%
Response rate	64%	52%	61%
# responding	not available	not available	339
Method	written survey	phone survey	phone survey

^a Information from the school's 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report unless otherwise noted.

^b Information provided by Brooklyn Excelsior administrators during inspection visit.

Table 9 shows that most parents responding to the survey have expressed overall satisfaction with Brooklyn Excelsior. In each year of operation, the school has conducted a survey that asks parents to rate Brooklyn Excelsior on a five-point scale (either a satisfaction scale or an agreement scale, depending on the survey item). As reported in its 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report, the school conducted a written survey in its first year of operation. Almost two-thirds of parents returned surveys (a 64% response rate) in the spring of 2004, and the school reports that 91.4% expressed overall satisfaction. In the spring of 2005, Brooklyn Excelsior implemented a phone survey system, which yielded a reported 52% response rate and 96% overall satisfaction.

School administrators provided detailed results from their most recent efforts to assess parent satisfaction, an item analysis of their phone survey that ended April 30, 2006 (with its phone survey strategy, the school provides a window of time that parents can take the survey). Based on their results,⁴ 73% of respondents reported being either "Highly Satisfied" or "Satisfied" with their child's experience at Brooklyn Excelsior. In general, parents more favorably responded to items related to their child's teacher than to school administration.

The school's charter application describes a parent involvement strategy that includes parent participation in six different committees (Leadership Development, Library, Grounds and Facility, Technology, Curriculum, and Boosters). The chairs of these

⁴ In their analysis of parent responses, school administrators provided two interpretations of the results—in one column they summarized parent responses by including the top two categories (i.e., either "Highly Satisfied and Satisfied" or "Strongly Agree and Agree"); in the other they included the top two categories plus a neutral category. This made the inspection team wonder what assumptions went into the school's previous reporting of parent satisfaction data (i.e., in their Accountability Plan Progress Report)—to report that parents who indicate they are "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" as being satisfied seems misleading.

committees were to serve on a School Leadership Team. Although the school reportedly maintains a stable cadre of parents as classroom volunteers, the inspection team found no evidence that the committee structure outlined in the Brooklyn Excelsior charter is operational. While the current principal described future plans for involving parents, most parents participating in a focus group during the inspection felt that the school administration and Board of Trustees did not listen to them. Several parents perceived the administration and Board as being unresponsive to their concerns, and were not happy that they were not allowed to form a Parent-Teacher Association. Interviews with several teachers and NHA representatives confirmed that the committee structure outlined in the school's charter application were not yet operational. Although several teachers reported having positive relations with parents, it appears largely due to individual effort. Several staff (including NHA representatives and some administrators) indicated that parent involvement is an area in need of improvement.

Most participants of the parent focus group indicated that they are not satisfied with the instability of the school's administration, the curriculum and what they perceive as a lack of rigor and challenge in their child's classroom. While most liked the school's effort to keep them informed through the internet (via Academic Link/At School), they did not feel well informed about administrative and Board decisions that affected their child. However, 75% of the 284 respondents on the latest parent satisfaction survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "The school keeps me informed."

Table 10: Enrollment and Attendance Data, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06

	Enrollment and Attendance		
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Approved Chartered Enrollment	240 ^a	480 ^a	555
Fall Enrollment ^b	206	440	
Wait list		350 ^c	512 ^d
Turnover ^c	21.3%	7.4%	
Average Daily Attendance	90.9% ^c	94.5% ^c	93.5% ^d

a From CSI's Second Year Report, 2004-05.

b Data provided by NHA prior to inspection visit.

c From 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report.

d Provided by administrators during inspection visit.

The school remains a popular option among prospective parents. Although the school did not meet its expected enrollment in 2003-04, the school has easily met its targets in 2004-05 and 2005-06, as shown in Table 10. Further, in each of the last two years the school has maintained a large waiting list, substantially above its Accountability Plan goal of 15% of total average enrollment. In its Accountability Plan, Brooklyn Excelsior includes the goal of having an average turnover rate of less than 15%, "excluding parents who move from their principal residence." As shown in Table 10, independent of why

parents withdrew their children from the school, Brooklyn Excelsior made its student turnover goal in 2004-05 but not 2003-04.

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

1. The Board has reorganized and is using performance data to focus its work on improving student achievement.

The Board of Trustees provided a presentation to the inspectors during the first day the team spent on site. The inspection team derived the evidence base for this finding from the Board's presentation.

The Board has established three committees: 1) the Executive Committee (the voice of the Board outside of its meetings, authorized to make decisions on follow-up items from board meetings); 2) the Human Resource and Training Committee (provides approval and oversight on staff evaluation, hiring and dismissal, as well as a forum for feedback from staff on school policies and procedures); and 3) the Student Performance, Curriculum and Assessment Committee (monitors schools test performance, ensures compliance with federal statute, monitors execution of, and changes to, the school's curriculum and establishes specific goals and metrics with the principal regarding student performance).

The Board president reported that NHA provides "monthly dashboard reports" on five subjects: the principal, discipline, school leadership, Board fund and school performance. These five management reports are given at every board meeting. School administrators indicated that the school performance reports focus on students' scores on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)'s Measure of Academic Progress (MAP). Describing a shift from using qualitative data to quantitative data, one Board member reported that the school now had more data to use and "better access to data" than they used to.

2. School administrators report using several measures of student learning to make decisions about student placement. Although the school has a wide array of formative assessments, teachers have not yet received sufficient support for using performance data to improve instruction in a systematic way throughout the school.

Brooklyn Excelsior administrators report using the following measures of student learning to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and make instructional decisions: NWEA's MAP scores, administered three times a year (fall, winter, spring) in the 2nd through 6th grades; Reading Assist Institute's (RAI) literacy assessment, administered in October, November and December in the 3rd through 6th grades; and, for kindergarten and 1st grade students, the computer-administered STAR Early Literacy assessment in the fall, February and at the end of May. School administrators reported making decisions about student placement based on the MAP scores, using the MAP scores to identify students for summer school, plan professional development, assign

students to classroom teachers. School administrators reported using students' STAR scores to determine who receives additional support from paraprofessionals.

The MAP, RAI and STAR assessments provide a rich array of student performance data. However, interviews with teachers and school administrators did not provide evidence of teachers' systematic use of data throughout the school. They have received little training on how to use the results. The school's professional development plan indicates, and interviews with school administrators confirm, that teachers had only recently received one day of training on NWEA's DesCartes system, a tool that is supposed to help teachers translate MAP scores into "state aligned skills and concepts." Several teachers mentioned in interviews that administrators expected them to use MAP scores to guide instruction, but that they were not sure how to do so.

3. Brooklyn Excelsior has an array of tools to monitor the quality of classroom instruction and provide support. Administrators conduct formal and informal teacher evaluations and teachers report more recent administrative presence in their classrooms.

Interviews with staff indicate that Brooklyn Excelsior administrators monitor the quality of instruction through formal and informal classroom observations, and evaluate its effectiveness by analyzing NWEA and RAI trends over time on a class-by-class basis. Although comments gathered on the informal teacher evaluation protocol, discussed above, could be easily quantifiable, administrators did not share summary data related to informal observations. Outside of their formal evaluations, the nature and type of feedback they described receiving varied substantially across teachers. School administrators reported focusing more of their time and energy in the classrooms of teachers they considered in need.

Administrators reported conducting a "holistic" ranking of teachers based on the quality of their lesson plans and classroom instruction, their ability to manage classrooms, and student learning measured on the NWEA and RAI assessments (discussed above). Administrators reported ranking teachers based on their evaluation of teachers in these four areas (lesson planning, classroom instruction, behavior management, and student assessment results); however, the team did not find any evidence of a systematic approach to this task; e.g., it appeared that the weight of each topic and of the formal and informal teacher evaluations were left up to the individual discretion of school administrators. Administrators described their efforts to spend more time in classrooms, and teachers confirmed that, since the change in principal leadership, there has been an increase in the administrative presence in their classrooms. Overall, while Brooklyn Excelsior has several tools to monitor the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction, and teachers report that administrators have recently spent more time in their classrooms, it is not clear how the various parts of the school's instructional support system fit together.

4. The school has consistent expectations for the physical appearance of classrooms and lesson planning, but not for effective instruction.

There are great similarities among the classrooms at Brooklyn Excelsior. All have the same alphabet posted at the front of room, small classroom libraries, word walls (classrooms include one for ELA, one for math or both), a variety of commercial and teacher made print materials (e.g., the writing process), and a large whiteboard that includes the daily schedule, a place for the teacher to write the student learning objective for each lesson, key vocabulary words, and student assignments. All classrooms include at least two computers, desks for every student and at least some posted student work, an overhead projector for transparencies and an overhead projector that connects to a computer at the teacher's desk. The school provided a professional development session in March 2006 on blackboard configuration—interviews with teachers and administrators, as well as classroom observations, confirmed that teachers are expected to arrange their blackboard in similar ways.

A review of 17 lesson plans (eight math, nine ELA) also reveals a high degree of similarity. Almost all refer to the specific curriculum being taught (Open Court for ELA and either Real Math or Saxon for mathematics), include specific learning objectives stated in behavioral terms (i.e., students will be able to...), identify the state learning standards taught through the lesson, describe the procedures for the lesson (i.e., what students will do), identify how the teacher will assess student understanding and close the lesson, and the homework students will complete connected to the lesson. Most of the math lesson plans include the materials needed for the lesson, while most of the ELA lessons indicate how teachers will engage students and tap their prior knowledge (i.e., the anticipatory set). Interviews with teachers and school administrators confirm that teachers are expected to submit their lesson plans to administrators on a weekly basis for review and comment.

Beyond clear and shared expectations for the classroom environment and lesson plan contents, Brooklyn Excelsior teachers and administrators do not appear to have a common understanding of what constitutes effective instruction. Despite the various tools that administrators use to provide teachers feedback on their practice (discussed above), administrators have not used these tools in a way that has led to systematic and ongoing conversations about instructional quality. However, there is evidence that administrators emphasize to teachers the importance of asking higher order questions (e.g., analysis, synthesis and evaluation questions on Bloom's taxonomy), and administrators reportedly review lesson plans with these criteria in mind. Almost all classrooms observed included a high number of teacher questions (very little teacher lecturing was observed). At this time, the school is at a nascent point in the use of questioning as an instructional tool, as evidenced by the questions teachers asked typically being factual in nature (i.e., lower on Bloom's taxonomy), and professional development could play a pivotal role in increasing their facility in this area.

Classroom observations revealed high variability in the quality of instruction, as well as discrepancies between what was planned and what was taught. For example, although the lesson plan for one class indicated it would address the New York Learning Standard on "Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation," the teacher only asked students to

exercise factual recall and basic understanding. Brooklyn Excelsior administrators have communicated to teachers expectations for the classroom environment and lesson plan content; however, they have not made clear to teachers their standards for the quality of instruction. While pockets of professional conversations reportedly exist (many notably involving the Director of Instruction), teacher interviews indicate that their existence is episodic and not yet systematic. Importantly, most teachers' experience of receiving helpful professional support appeared to be dependent on the presence of the Director of Instruction. Most of the professional development teachers received seemed to be offered on a staff-wide basis; several teachers reported wanting more targeted support tailored to their individual needs.

5. Classroom observations indicate that students generally interact positively with each other and with teachers and hallways were orderly throughout the school day.

Throughout the inspection visit, inspectors observed students interacting positively with each other, especially in the lower grades, and with their classroom teachers at all grades. Students were observed transitioning between classrooms (for Reading Enhancement, and for specials such as Art, Physical Education and Music) in a quiet and orderly manner. Most teachers, especially in the upper grades, were effectively able to maintain order and control. Overall, across the grades, few student disruptions of instruction were observed.

Although inspectors found a common set of teacher expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate student behavior, Brooklyn Excelsior does not yet appear to have a common approach to behavior management or a school-wide discipline policy. During classroom observations, some teachers rewarded students with candy while others kept track of student digressions in a notebook. One administrator reported that while teachers know what kind of behavior warrants action—i.e., what is good and what is bad behavior—many do not know how to address misbehavior and “each teacher is using a different type of behavior management.” Although school administration provided the inspection team a memo distributed to teachers on the Brooklyn Excelsior’s disciplinary “ladder of referral,” it was dated the week before the inspection occurred. Interviews with teachers indicated that a school-wide approach to handle discipline issues was not yet in place.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

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

- 1. Although the Board remains unified in its vision for the school, stakeholders express different understandings and interpretations of the Brooklyn Excelsior mission.**

Brooklyn Excelsior mission: Working with parents and community, Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School will offer a challenging character-based education by providing a strong curriculum and an atmosphere of high expectations.

The Board of Trustees continues to be a stable presence at Brooklyn Excelsior and is unified in its approach to supporting the school's mission. In response to the 2nd year site visit report, the Board reorganized its work on improving student achievement and continues to work with its management organization, the National Heritage Academies (NHA), to develop a strong curriculum based on state learning standards. A review of school and NHA documents, interviews with teachers and focus groups conducted with parents, and teachers, however, revealed different understandings of the school's mission.

The school's original charter application and the NHA website indicate a focus on providing students a basic education with an emphasis on the classics, e.g. English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The inspection team did not find any evidence that a focus on basic education or the classics was still a part of Brooklyn Excelsior's mission.

Interviews and focus groups with teachers revealed different understandings of the school's mission. While some emphasized growing the "whole child," others focused on students' academic achievement and improving student behavior. The inspection team was not surprised to hear such different perspectives regarding the school mission, especially among a relatively new and inexperienced staff. However, what stood out in staff interviews was the absence of any mention of involving parents or community in the school. Although individual teachers reported having strong relationships with their students' parents, they did not connect these efforts to fulfilling the school mission. Further, although a few teachers mentioned developing students beyond increasing their performance on standardized tests, only a few mentioned character-education in the context of Brooklyn Excelsior's mission.

Several participants in the parent focus group presented not so much a different understanding of the Brooklyn Excelsior mission as a different perspective of whether it was being realized at the school. For example, whereas NHA representatives and school administrators touted parent attendance at a recent Board meeting, parents reported feeling ignored by school leaders. Parents were frustrated by not having a Parent-Teacher Association and by the fact that the school had not implemented the parent-teacher committees promised in the Parent Handbook (see Organizational Viability Question 1 above). Although parent and community involvement is proffered as a key portion of the Brooklyn Excelsior mission, the inspection team found no evidence that the school is effectively engaging parents.

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

- 1. Classroom observations revealed physical evidence of the school's efforts to provide character education to students, but not evidence of integrating it into the fabric of the school. The most recent administration of the parent**

survey indicates that the school is not meeting its expected target for this goal.

In its Accountability Plan, Brooklyn Excelsior lists the goal of providing “all students with a character development program that is incorporated into daily instruction.” During classroom observations, inspectors noted that the moral focus for the month — integrity—was displayed in nearly every classroom. Further, the daily schedule posted in classrooms, and school’s master schedule, indicated that time is allocated every day to teaching Brooklyn Excelsior moral focus curriculum. Finally, at the time of the visit, a classroom teacher had been recently re-assigned from teaching 5th grade to a support position concentrating on moral focus. Beyond this physical evidence, however, there was scant evidence of it being a living part of the school. In all but one classroom visit, no observation was made of the teacher mentioning “integrity” to students or encouraging students to discuss or otherwise reflect on what it means.

Staff interviews indicated that while some teachers reported using the moral focus curriculum, others did not value it. According to one staff member, “Teachers feel it is something they have to do. There is no buy in.” Teachers reported dutifully following the moral focus curriculum, but some teachers indicated they did not see it as particularly effective. One teacher shared he did not think the moral focus curriculum was a particularly effective way to develop students’ character. Some participants of the parent focus group equated the school’s moral focus with student discipline.

Table 11: Parent Survey Results for the Question Related to Moral Focus, 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06

	Does the school deliver on its promise of moral guidance?		
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Parent Agreement	92% ^a	95% ^a	64% ^b

^a From 2004-05 Accountability Plan Progress Report

^b From survey results provided during inspection visit

The school relies on the parent survey to measure progress toward meeting its character development goal (per its Accountability Plan). Although the school reports meeting its goal in 2003-04 and 2004-05, the most recent administration of the parent survey that only 64% of respondents agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (24%) with the statement “My child’s school delivers on its promise of moral guidance,” well below its goal of 90%.

PART II: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN: ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN OUTCOMES

Goal 1: Students will be proficient in Language Arts.

Measure 1: For the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State ELA Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group): PS #114, PS #115, PS #279, PS #189, and PS #308. The percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of similar schools within Region 8 of the New York City School District.

Measure 3: For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of students at Brooklyn Excelsior will reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Total Reading Battery. If a cohort's average baseline NCE score exceeds 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.

Goal Two: Students will be proficient in Mathematics.

Measure 1: For the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Math Assessment. For the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Math Assessment.

Measure 2: The percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of similar schools within Region 8 of the New York City School District. For the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, the results were based on fourth grade students. For the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, results will be based on students in grades 3-7 combined.

Measure 3: For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of students at Brooklyn Excelsior will reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Math Battery.

Goal 3: Students will be proficient in Science.

Measure 1: For the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior for two or more years will perform at/or

above a Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment. For the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Science Assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State Science Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group): PS #114, PS #115, PS #279, PS #189, and PS #308. The percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of similar schools within Region 8 of the New York City School District.

Measure 3: For the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, cohorts of students at Brooklyn Excelsior will reduce by one-half the gap between the baseline performance and grade level on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Total Reading Battery. If a cohort's average baseline NCE score exceeds 50, it will be expected to show an increase in its NCE score.

Goal Four: Students will be proficient in Social Studies.

Measure 1: For the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, 75% of fourth graders who have been enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior for two or more years will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment. For the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 60% of second year students, 70% of third year students, and 75% of fourth year students enrolled at Brooklyn Excelsior will perform at/or above a Level 3 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment.

Measure 2: Each year, the percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 on the New York State Social Studies Assessment will exceed the following public schools (all identified as in the same similar school comparison group): PS #114, PS #115, PS #279, PS #189, and PS #308. The percent of all Brooklyn Excelsior students at Levels 3 and 4 will also exceed that of similar schools within Region 8 of the New York City School District.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Brooklyn Excelsior should ensure that all students who have taken state or NWEA tests for two successive years are included in cohort analyses, as indicated by the measures in its Accountability Plan, even if they subsequently leave the school. Some of the data available from the state website is different than what the school included in its 2004-05 Progress Report (e.g., data on comparison schools).
2. The NWEA's Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), while providing potentially useful information to guide classroom practice and make other instructional decisions, is apparently not well-aligned with state learning standards, especially

given the absence of a writing component and extended-response items, which both require higher order skill than just multiple-choice responses. In order to gauge progress toward its Accountability Plan goals, the school might consider establishing interim goals and benchmarks based on assessments that are aligned with state standards.

3. Report data in ways consistent with the Accountability Plan. Some of the data the school uses to track progress is presented in ways that are different than the analytic methods promised by the Brooklyn Excelsior Accountability Plan. While alternative analytic methods (e.g., percent of students meeting NWEA growth targets) may serve other important purposes, the school should consider always analyzing data, as indicated by its Accountability Plan (e.g., the gap between baseline performance and grade level).

II. ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY

Goal 1: Brooklyn Excelsior will demonstrate demand for its educational program.

Measure 1: Brooklyn Excelsior measured enrollment levels in the fall and spring, as well as at the close of the school year, to ensure the school meets or exceeds target enrollment rates as outlined below:

Year One:	220
Year Two:	340
Year Three:	440
Year Four:	540
Year Five:	640

Measure 2: Brooklyn Excelsior will maintain a waiting list that reflects at least 15% of the total average enrollment. The waiting list will be measured in the fall and spring, as well as at the close of the school year.

Measure 3: Brooklyn Excelsior will maintain less than a 15% average student turnover rate (excluding parents who move from their principal residence), as measured in the fall for the prior school year. Additionally, the turnover rate will be measured in the spring and at the close of the school year.

Goal Two: Students will show an incremental increase in average daily attendance.

Measure 1: Each year, the average percent of attendance for all Brooklyn Excelsior students will meet and/or exceed the following public schools (all identified as a similar school comparison group):

- PS #114
- PS #115
- PS #279
- PS #189
- PS #308

The average percent of attendance for all Brooklyn Excelsior students will also exceed that of New York City School District.

Measure 2: Brooklyn Excelsior's average attendance rate will improve at an increasing rate each year until 93% attendance is achieved:

- Year One: 90%
- Year Two: 92%
- Year Three: 93%
- Year Four: 93%
- Year Five: 93%

Goal Three: Brooklyn Excelsior will properly manage and govern the school.

Measure 1: Brooklyn Excelsior will employ a certified independent public accounting firm to perform an annual audit of the financial statements, which is indicative of sound financial management. The audited financial statements and audit opinion will be submitted to the Charter Schools Institute and the New York State Education Department.

Measure 2: Brooklyn Excelsior will meet or exceed annual budget targets each fiscal year. Budgets will be submitted annually to the New York State Education Department and the Charter Schools Institute.

Measure 3: Brooklyn Excelsior will meet all deadlines for federal, state, and local reporting requirements, including (but not limited to) an Annual Report and Accountability Progress Report.

Goal 4: Brooklyn Excelsior will achieve a high rate of parent satisfaction, as measured on an annual basis.

Measure 1: A parent survey will be conducted on at least an annual basis. Baseline data will be established in school year 2003-04. Progress will be measured at least annually to ensure the school meets or exceeds an overall parent satisfaction rate of 90% by the 2006-07 school year with at least 75% of the parents responding.

ORGANIZATIONAL VIABILITY GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Report data in consistent formats and using the same assumptions from year to year. Given the instability of school administration, it is understandable that different assumptions were used to calculate some of the measures included in the Accountability Plan and that provided to the team during the inspection. In order to ensure consistency, the school should make explicit and transparent what assumptions undergird the figures it reports. As noted in the text of this report, particular clarity is needed for calculating student turnover and parent satisfaction. The school should figure out a way to reliably determine the response rate for the parent phone survey.
2. Consider creating additional measures of stakeholder satisfaction. Given the instability among staff, the school should consider formal ways to solicit teachers' anonymous feedback and input on key school decisions (e.g., professional development). Given the school's strong technology infrastructure, the school

should also consider developing an on-line means for soliciting students' perceptions of their educational experience on regular basis.

III. UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

Goal One: Brooklyn Excelsior will provide all students with a character development program that is incorporated into daily instruction.

Measure 1: The school's character development program has been developed to equip students with a moral foundation by studying key virtues (Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice) as well as studying the heroes (e.g. Abraham Lincoln) who exemplify them. Progress will be measured via a parent survey at least annually to ensure the school meets or exceeds an overall parent satisfaction rate of 90% by the 2006-07 school year.

UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC AREA GOALS—RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop more robust measures of progress. Currently, the school measures progress toward this accountability goal through one question on the parent satisfaction survey. The school should also consider strategies to deepen the impact of its "moral focus" within the classroom. Such deepening may take the form of engaging teachers, parents and students in conversations about what "moral focus" looks like on a daily basis and considering additional means for assessing and sharing progress.

APPENDIX A: EVIDENCE BASE FOR INSPECTION REPORT

Key Documents Reviewed:

- 2003-04 Accountability Plan Progress Report
- Charter School Institute's Second Year Report
- School's Original Charter Application
- School's Accountability Plan
- Curriculum documents provided by the school
- Parent Handbook
- Student work folders
- 17 lesson plans
- Board minutes
- Results from standardized tests (New York State and NWEA assessments)
- Parent satisfaction survey results
- Enrollment history
- Teacher observation forms

Classroom Observations:

- 24 classroom observations (range: 20-55 minutes; average: 39 minutes)

Interviews and Focus Groups:

- 14 one on one interviews (30-40 minutes) with classroom teachers (after observations)
- Three teachers focus groups that included specialists and paraprofessionals (18 total participants)
- One on one interviews with the Principal, the Director of Instruction, the Assistant Principal, the Special Assistant to the Principal and the Special Education Coordinator
- Interview with two representatives from the National Heritage Academies
- Meeting with the Board of Trustees
- Parent focus group (8 participants)
- Two student focus groups (15 total participants)

APPENDIX B: 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; review of student work; class visits
Organizational Viability	Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?	Interviews, survey results
	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 C: SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BROOKLYN EXCELSIOR CHARTER SCHOOL**

I. Academic Program Goals

<i>Goals 1-4: Students will be proficient in language arts, math, science and social studies</i>	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<p>M1: 75% of Students who have been enrolled for two or more years will score at Levels 3 or 4 on the NY state tests.</p> <p>M2: The percent of students scoring at Levels 3 and 4 on NY state tests will be greater than comparison schools and Region 8.</p> <p>M3: Student cohorts will increase the number of students who reach grade level proficiency, as measured by the median NCE based on NWEA’s MAP scores.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Capture data when it becomes available to maximize size of the cohort data needed for reporting academic progress. ❖ Establish realistic interim goals and use the RAI literacy assessment and other tests that are aligned with state learning standards to benchmark progress. ❖ Report data in ways consistent with the Accountability Plan.

II. Organizational Viability Goals

<i>Goal 1: Brooklyn Excelsior will demonstrate demand for its educational program.</i>	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<p>M1: Measure enrollment and compare to expected levels.</p> <p>M2: Maintain waiting list of at least 15% of enrollment.</p> <p>M3: Maintain turnover rate of 15% or less.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Report data in consistent formats from year to year and make assumptions explicit.
<i>Goal 2: Students will show an incremental increase in average daily attendance.</i>	
<p>M1: Compare ADA five NY schools and region 8 average.</p> <p>M2: Increase ADA each year until 93%.</p>	
<i>Goal 3: Brooklyn Excelsior will properly manage and govern the school.</i>	
<p>M1: Audit statements from certified independent public accountant</p> <p>M2: Meet or exceed annual budget targets each fiscal year.</p> <p>M3: Brooklyn Excelsior will meet all deadlines for federal, state, and local reporting requirement.</p>	
<i>Goal 4: Brooklyn Excelsior will achieve a high rate of parent satisfaction, as measured on an annual basis.</i>	
<p>M1: Parent survey results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Report data in consistent formats from year to year and make assumptions explicit. ❖ Consider creating additional measures of stakeholder satisfaction.

III. Unique Programmatic Areas

<i>Goal 1: Brooklyn Excelsior will provide all students with a character development program that is incorporated into daily instruction.</i>	
<i>Proposed Measures</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
M1: Item on parent survey.	❖ Develop more robust measures of progress.