

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT  
BRONX CHARTER SCHOOL  
FOR EXCELLENCE 3*

*VISIT DATE: FEBRUARY 14, 2018  
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**Charter Schools Institute**  
The State University of New York



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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its February 14, 2018 first year school evaluation visit to the Bronx Charter School for Excellence 3 ("Bronx Excellence 3").

## REPORT FORMAT

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

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

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

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# INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

## SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for Bronx Excellence 3, a replication of the flagship Bronx Charter School for Excellence (“Bronx Excellence 1”), on June 13, 2016. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2017, serving 150 students in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade during the 2017-18 school year. The school operates in co-located privately leased space at 3956 Carpenter Avenue, Bronx, NY 10466 within New York City Central School District (“CSD”) 11 along with St. Mary School, a private Catholic school. At scale, Bronx Excellence 3 will serve 540 students in Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

The education corporation contracts with Bronx Excellence Community Schools, Inc. (“Bronx Excellence” or the “network”), a New York-based not-for-profit charter management organization (“CMO”), to provide back office and oversight support. The network also contracts with two other SUNY-authorized schools in New York, Bronx Excellence 1 and Bronx Charter School for Excellence 2 (“Bronx Excellence 2”), as well as one Connecticut-based school, Stamford Excellence Charter School (“Stamford Excellence”). The network will open a fifth SUNY-authorized school, Bronx Charter School for Excellence 4 (“Bronx Excellence 4”), in fall 2018.

The mission of Bronx Excellence 3 is:



*The Bronx Charter Schools for Excellence prepare young people in New York City to compete for admission to and succeed in top public, private, and parochial high schools by cultivating their intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. The Bronx Charter Schools for Excellence will accomplish this by offering a challenging and rigorous academic curriculum, which at the earliest of grades will have an eye toward college preparation. The Bronx Charter Schools for Excellence will achieve this in a supportive and caring environment that maintains high expectations for all students.*

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of the Bronx Excellence 3 facility at the above address on August 31, 2017, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that Bronx Excellence 3 had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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

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

## DOES BRONX EXCELLENCE 3 HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

Bronx Excellence 3 regularly gathers assessment data and uses it to improve student learning and instructional effectiveness. The school consistently administers standardized and curriculum-based assessments and uses the data from these assessments to adjust instruction and determine academic interventions for students in need of additional support.

- Bronx Excellence 3 regularly administers standardized and curriculum-based assessments. Teachers administer the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress ("MAP") and Developmental Reading Assessment ("DRA") four times per year to determine a baseline achievement level and track student growth over time. In addition to these standardized assessments, the school administers a variety of curriculum-based assessments, which generally take place at the end of each unit. Teachers score assessments immediately after administering them using shared rubrics to ensure validity.
- Bronx Excellence 3 keeps parents apprised of their student's progress through formal report cards that the schools sends home quarterly, as well as through more frequent progress reports every two weeks. Parents also receive copies of any weekly assessments administered to students. Parents must sign and return these assessments to confirm they have reviewed their student's results.

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1B

1. An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include:

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf>; and

[http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie\\_fryer\\_revision\\_final.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf).

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks is available at: [www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/).

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Bronx Excellence 3 uses the online platform Illuminate to compile, track, and analyze student data. Teachers consistently enter data into Illuminate shortly after scoring assessments and can view data reports instantaneously. In addition, leaders and teachers receive in-depth score reports on both class level and student level results from the MAP and DRA.
- The school’s leaders and teachers frequently review student achievement data and use it to adjust instruction. Leaders and teachers review MAP and DRA data at the end of each quarter and use them to determine which students will receive extra support through morning tutoring or small group instruction. Teachers also use a well defined cycle to respond to assessment data. Teachers review data in Illuminate and adjust their lesson plans if the data indicate that certain topics require re-teaching during class. For topics that require re-teaching, teachers develop new lesson plans to address areas where students struggled and administer an exit ticket to check for understanding at the end of the lesson, which allows teachers to assess quickly which students require additional support.

## DOES BRONX EXCELLENCE 3’S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

Bronx Excellence 3 has a clear curriculum development process that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction. The network and instructional leaders support teachers in planning and implementing effective lesson plans.

- Teachers at Bronx Excellence 3 implement a variety of curricular materials. The school uses Journeys for English language arts (“ELA”), Teachers College Reading and Writing Project for writing, Math in Focus and Engage NY for mathematics, FOSS for science, and an internally developed curriculum for social studies. The network and teachers customize the scope and sequence and texts for these curricula to meet the needs of students in their classes. Teachers receive ample materials to support their execution of these curricula, including manipulatives, curriculum books, kits, and other resources, all of which the network provides.
- Staff at the network create unit and pacing guide documents that outline what objectives teachers cover each day, thus providing teachers with a clear sense of what to teach and when to teach it. Teachers on each grade level divide planning responsibilities so that one teacher owns the daily lesson planning for each content area based on the guide the network provides. School and network leadership then provide feedback on lesson plans via Google Documents before the assigned teacher finalizes and distributes them to the rest of the grade level team.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 1D

### IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT BRONX EXCELLENCE 3?

Quality instruction is generally evident in classrooms at Bronx Excellence 3, though many teachers miss opportunities to challenge students with questions that drive higher-order thinking. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit Institute team members conducted 9 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

GRADE		
Total Kindergarten and 1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Observations		
CONTENT AREA	ELA	3
	Writing	2
	Math	2
	Soc Stu	1
	Science	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

- Most teachers at Bronx Excellence 3 deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (6 out of 9 classrooms observed). Teachers deliver focused lessons and conduct purposeful activities aligned to the lesson objective. All classrooms have a teacher and an assistant teacher; in most cases, each teacher has a clear role in supporting student learning. However, some classes miss opportunities to maximize the multiple adults in the room by employing a "one teach, one assist" model rather than leveraging both teachers to support students academically.
- About half of the teachers at Bronx Excellence 3 regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (4 out of 9 classrooms observed). Some teachers use checklists or running records during small group work to take notes on student responses. Several teachers employ methods such as cold-calling or call-and-response to check for understanding throughout instruction. However, several teachers miss opportunities to check for understanding. For instance, many teachers circulate around the room while students are working independently in order to manage student engagement but neglect to check in with students or take notes on the work students are completing.
- Very few teachers at Bronx Excellence 3 include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking and problem solving skills (1 out of 9 classrooms observed). Teachers miss opportunities to push students toward more rigorous, higher-order thinking by

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

asking primarily directive, recall questions rather than analytical or open-ended questions that require deeper thinking. Most instruction consists of teacher-to-student talk with few opportunities for students to interact or discuss and critique each other's ideas. The school has identified this as an area of focus for the future and intends to provide additional professional development to teachers in this area.

- About half of the teachers at Bronx Excellence 3 maximize learning time and utilize effective classroom management techniques that create a consistent focus on academic achievement (5 out of 9 classrooms observed). Most classes have a formal behavior management system in place that teachers use consistently to maintain a positive class environment. Teachers regularly use timers to keep lessons on pace and communicate a sense of urgency, and use consistent language to communicate expectations to students.

## DOES BRONX EXCELLENCE 3 HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Bronx Excellence 3 has strong instructional leadership that provides teachers with support in both planning and implementing lessons. The school receives additional support in coaching teachers from content specialists at the network who are consistently on site to observe and meet with teachers on designated days each week.

- Bronx Excellence 3's leadership has promoted a culture of learning and scholarship, and the school's instructional leadership is adequate to support the development of the teaching staff. The principal provides consistent support to teachers in the form of regular informal and formal observations and meetings. Additionally, teachers receive support from network learning specialists in mathematics, ELA, and science, who spend designated days each week at the school. All network specialists spend time on site observing and meeting with teachers to provide support with curriculum development and instructional practice.
- Instructional leaders provide sustained and systematic coaching and supervision. The principal observes teachers at least once per week and meets with them individually or as a grade level team to discuss key takeaways from observations. The principal also shares feedback with teachers via email and Whetsone, an online system that allows instructional staff to track when observations and meetings take place, share feedback, and manage action steps that result from observations and post-observation meetings. While observations and feedback take place on a regular basis, the school does not have a formal system in place to track whether teachers are implementing the feedback they receive or demonstrating progress in identified growth areas.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Bronx Excellence 3 has regular professional development activities that assist teachers in meeting student academic needs. For example, school staff meet throughout the school year every Wednesday for ongoing professional development on timely topics. Teachers often present at these meetings and lead professional development sessions for their peers. Network leaders conduct four network-wide professional development sessions each year based on what teachers request and what network specialists observe in classrooms. For example, earlier this school year instructional leaders identified small group reading as an area of development, so all teachers received professional development on effective small group reading strategies.
- Instructional leaders at Bronx Excellence 3 have conducted teacher evaluations based on clear criteria from the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Before starting the evaluation process, the school conducted a professional development session on the framework to ensure teachers understand the criteria leaders use to evaluate them. The evaluation process includes a pre-observation meeting, a formal classroom observation, and a post-observation meeting. Teachers complete a self-evaluation survey and score themselves using the Danielson framework before the evaluation process begins and discuss the survey with the principal as part of the pre-observation meeting; after the post-observation meeting, the principal assigns each teacher a score based on the framework.

## DOES BRONX EXCELLENCE 3 MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS?

Bronx Excellence 3 addresses the needs of students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and English language learners (“ELLs”). The school implements a variety of interventions and supports to meet student needs and ensure all students are able to succeed academically.

- Bronx Excellence 3 has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures. Teachers, as well as school and network leaders, regularly review data from student assessments to track student growth over time. Teachers analyze the data and implement support interventions such as early morning tutoring before the school day begins or, if the issue is behavioral in nature, creating a behavior tracking “star chart.”, if the data indicate students are not making adequate progress. Teachers stay in regular contact with the parents of students receiving interventions in order to update parents on their students’ progress. Teachers meet with network special education staff monthly as part of a child study team (“CST”) to review student data and assess the effectiveness of interventions. If teachers and

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

network special education staff determine that a student is not making adequate progress with the current interventions, they refer the student to the district committee on special education (“CSE”) for additional evaluation.

- Bronx Excellence 3 deploys sufficient resources including staff, classes and settings, and materials to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs. A special education coordinator from the network oversees the academic program for at-risk students and ensures that the school implements interventions and settings in accordance with students’ needs and, where applicable, their individualized education plans (“IEPs”). Bronx Excellence 3 provides Special Education Teacher Support Services (“SETSS”) as required by students’ IEPs, and several classrooms have an additional adult called an educational associate, which enables the school to provide small group support tailored to students’ individual needs. Teachers and school- and network-based leaders regularly analyze data from student assessments to determine which supports students need and assign students to small groups. For example, teachers and leaders assign students who are not making adequate progress in reading to a Foundations class, which provides them with foundational literacy skills and phonics instruction. Bronx Excellence 3 provides support to its 13 ELLs by implementing classroom interventions such as preferential seating and repetition of novel words, but the school does not currently employ a teacher certified or trained in working specifically with ELLs.
- The school provides sufficient time and support for ongoing coordination between general and at-risk teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers. Teachers and network special education staff meet at least monthly to discuss student progress. Additionally, the network special education coordinator occasionally observes students during class and follows up with teachers to discuss findings and determine whether additional interventions may be necessary. Teachers also regularly discuss student progress during weekly grade level meetings.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 20

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

Bronx Excellence 3's school and network organizational structure supports the delivery of the educational program.

- Bronx Excellence 3 has put in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. The school is adequately staffed with clear lines of reporting between supervisors and their reports. Network staff lend robust support in the areas of curriculum development, back office operations, professional development, and special education coordination.
- Bronx Excellence 3 has established a safe and orderly environment. Teachers use a “star chart” to track student behavior, which allows students to monitor their own behavior and understand the rationale for these consequences. Teachers also regularly call home to keep parents apprised of their student’s behavior. The principal supports behavior management by pulling students for one-on-one conversations if their behavior escalates and/or becomes disruptive. Teacher culture at Bronx Excellence 3 is collaborative, as evidenced by teachers’ regularly observing one another’s classes and turning to one another for advice. Moreover, teachers are able to bring concerns and grievances to school leaders, who invite teacher input and respond accordingly.
- Bronx Excellence 3 has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals. Classrooms have adequate staff and materials in order to meet students’ needs, and the organization is structured such that teachers know to whom to turn should they need support in a particular area.

Bronx Excellence 3 receives support from the network in meeting its enrollment and retention targets. The Network uses the following strategies to recruit and retain students:

- Posting information about school lotteries in various Bronx newspapers in order to reach a wide audience of prospective families;
- Advertising via radio in both Spanish and English and dispatching Spanish-speaking staff members to local early education centers to share information about the school with prospective families;
- Hosting family chats during which school leaders meet with prospective families, including those whose student has an IEP; and,

Holding an annual multi-cultural day during which students and families have the opportunity to share elements of their culture with the larger school community.

# BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

## SUNY RENEWAL BENCHMARK 2D

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

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

- The Bronx Excellence 3 board has the appropriate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school. Board members possess a variety of backgrounds in professions such as education, finance, philanthropy, and law, which enable them to support the successful functioning of the school and oversee it effectively. Four of the school's five founding members remain since the submission of the school's original application.
- The board meets regularly, and receives sufficient information from school and network leaders to provide rigorous oversight; however, the board does not consistently submit meeting minutes to the Institute according to the timeline indicated in the Charter Agreement. At board meetings, school and network staff report to the board on topics including financial health, teacher and student recruitment, and academic program outcomes. Additionally, at the time of the Institute's visit the board had recently seen a presentation about the schools' strategic academic plan and discussed the need for additional initiatives that would enable students at the network's schools to perform well on this year's state exams.

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# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## BRONX CHARTER SCHOOL FOR EXCELLENCE 3 BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>3</sup>

### CHAIR

Kathy Lathen

### VICE CHAIR

Mardi Schechter

### TREASURER

Lisa Kiell

### SECRETARY

Stacy Lauren

### TRUSTEES

Joyce Frost

Dierdre Flynn

## SCHOOL LEADERS

*Charlton Clarke, Principal (2017-18)*

## SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT <sup>4</sup>	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2017-18	150	148	99%	K - 1 <sup>st</sup>	K - 1 <sup>st</sup>

## CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
February 14, 2018	Maureen Foley	Director for New Charters
	Keegan Prue	Program Analyst

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

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

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# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
High academic standards	+
A broad liberal arts education	+
Foundational academic and critical thinking skills that expand to a 21st century global perspective	+
Longer school day	+
Performance-based compensation for staff	+
Clearly articulated standards for students that encourage holistic growth	+
School uniforms for students	+
A commitment to academic performance accountability	+