



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# True North Troy Preparatory Charter School

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## School Evaluation Report 2009-2010

Visit Date: March 18, 2010

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## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding the current visit to the school, summarizing areas of strength and areas for growth. The second section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. The third section, entitled School Evaluation Visit, presents the analysis of evidence collected during the current evaluation visit. A summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations is also provided as background and context for the current evaluation.

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

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

Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit to the True North Troy Charter School (True North Troy), the school is making substantial progress toward achieving its mission and meeting the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks considered during this evaluation. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

### *Academic Success*

#### Areas of Strength:

- True North Troy regularly administers assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state standards and systematically collects valid and reliable assessment data and analyzes the results. The school effectively uses results to inform instructional planning and identify students for remediation.
- The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.
- Students are cognitively engaged by grade-level appropriate instruction.
- Instructional leaders instill high expectations for teacher performance and student achievement and provide teachers with sustained and systematic support.
- The school is effective in helping students who are struggling academically.
- The school is safe and orderly and teachers have effective classroom management and routines that promote learning. The school has a clear discipline system in place that is consistently applied.
- The school has a comprehensive professional development program that successfully develops the competencies and skills of all teachers.

### *Organizational Capacity*

#### Areas of Strength:

- The school has faithfully followed its mission and key design elements.
- The school is competently managed and has hired and retained quality staff.
- The board has adequate skills, structures and procedures with which to govern the school. It holds school leaders, the management organization and itself accountable for student achievement.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

### Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	October 26, 2007
Date Initial Charter Approved by: Board of Regents	March 11, 2008
School Opening Date	September, 2009

### Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades at Location	District
2009-10 through present	82 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street Troy, NY	All	Troy School District

### Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	Uncommon Schools, Inc.	CMO	2008 - present

### Current Mission Statement

The mission of True North Troy Preparatory Charter School (“Troy Prep”) is to prepare all students to enter and succeed in college through effort, achievement and the content of their character. All Troy Prep students will demonstrate excellence in Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and History, while consistently exemplifying the virtues of diligence, integrity, compassion, responsibility, respect and perseverance.

### Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intentional standards-driven teaching and the systematic use of objective student performance data to inform decision-making, including the use of internal diagnostic assessments;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meticulously planned and designed in-house professional development activities for teachers, including a two-week pre-service training;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upon entry into the school, students take a diagnostic assessment evaluating the skills they have mastered so that enrichment and remediation opportunities will be provided accordingly;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured and rigorous behavioral standards and a school culture which inspires students to seek excellence;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on building relationships, evidenced by assigning each student to a teacher that will serve as his/her advisor; and</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared decision making process that involves teachers in school decisions.</li> </ul>

## School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades
2007-08	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2008-09	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2009-10	78	NA	59	5	5
2010-11	153	110	110	5-6	5-6
2011-12	227	217			

## Student Demographics

	2009-10	
	Percent of School Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	Percent of Troy School District Enrollment <sup>3</sup>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	N/A
Black or African American	69%	34.2%
Hispanic	12%	9.4%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0	1.4%
White	19%	55%
Multiracial	0%	0%
<b>Special Populations</b>		
Students with Disabilities	18%	14.08%
Limited English Proficient	0%	2%
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>		
Eligible for Free Lunch	84%	N/A
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	12.5%	N/A
Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price lunch	94.5%	65%

<sup>1</sup> Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

<sup>2</sup> Source: This information is not yet publicly available; all statistics given were provided by the school.

<sup>3</sup> Source for district special population data is the most recent available from the 2008-09 State Report Cards.

#### Current Board of Trustees<sup>4</sup>

<b>Board Member Name</b>	<b>Position/Committees</b>
Susan Miller Barker	Chair
Jaynesha Brown	Trustee
Jeff Buell	Trustee
Joeseph Klein	Trustee
Doug Lemov	Trustee
Kenneth Baer	Trustee
Rev. Eric Shaw	Trustee
Thomas Triscari	Trustee

#### School Leader(s)

<b>School Year</b>	<b>School Leader(s) Name and Title</b>
2009-10	Paul Powell, Principal and Anna Hall, Director of Operations

#### School Visit History

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Visit Type</b>	<b>Evaluator (Institute/External)</b>	<b>Date</b>
2009-10	First Year Visit	Institute	March 18, 2010

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Institute Board Records.

## SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

### Background

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

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

The following section presents an analysis of the observations and conclusions from this first year evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team, is provided.

### Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

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

**The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve student learning.**

The school regularly administers assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state standards. Placement exams in reading, writing and mathematics are administered in the summer and used to create three class sections based mostly on reading levels. Interim assessments are administered approximately every seven weeks and were described as "relatively set" for the year. They are modeled on the state exams. Teachers were observed and reported using formative assessments, including frequent questioning and exit tickets.

The school systematically collects valid and reliable assessment data and analyzes the results. Scoring guides and rubrics are used to norm assessment results. Interim assessments are administered and graded in a week at the end of each cycle, when teachers grade open-ended questions and multiple choice questions are scored using a scanner. Data are available at the end of assessment week, when teachers meet to analyze the results, including an item analysis linked to standards. An action plan template is employed to identify standards students' missed and individual students who are struggling, discuss why, and determine how to re-teach going forward. The school reportedly follows up on these plans by incorporating topics that students have not fully mastered into their Do Nows or exit tickets and by recycling the topics into future tests and interim assessments.

The school effectively uses results to inform instructional planning and identify students for remediation. Teachers use exit tickets to identify topics for re-teaching and to revise questions and problems in assignment packets. Assessment results are also used to place students into leveled classes, which are flexible. Finally, results are used to identify students for pull-out instruction, tutoring and Saturday school.

The school follows clear policies and procedures for the use of student performance data. Progress reports and report cards are distributed regularly. True North Troy plans to use attendance and grades to determine promotion; the parent handbook indicates that students who fail one core class will be expected to repeat the grade.

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

#### **The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.**

The school has a comprehensive and organized curriculum framework and scope and sequences, which is shared by its sister school (True North Rochester) in the True North network. The scope and sequences are organized by intervals that are aligned to interim assessments. While the English language arts and mathematics curricula are well defined, the social studies scope and sequence was described as less “fleshed out.” The school is emphasizing literacy skills through historical fiction in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and plans to add more social studies content, research and analysis in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The principal indicated that they are implementing a new approach to writing; they are planning to increase the quantity of writing.

Teachers know what to teach and when to teach it. They are expected to create weekly syllabi and turn them in at the beginning of the week. Unit and lesson plans are posted on the school’s shared server. Teacher-created packets containing text, sample problems and assignments are the predominant instructional materials used at the school. Teachers use resources from True North Rochester “as a starting point” and adapt them to meet their needs. For example, packets are “tweaked by teachers,” i.e., new questions scripted, problems added and language changed. Supplemental materials are used during pull-out instruction such as the Wilson reading program.

The school has an effective process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum framework and resources. As noted, the school relies on True North Rochester for scope and sequences and teaching packets, which it then adapts to its own needs, and plans to do the same for next year’s new 6<sup>th</sup> grade. All curriculum resources are archived on a shared server, providing a resource for future curriculum development.

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

#### **Adequate instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.**

Teachers implement purposeful lessons with objectives aligned to state standards and the school’s curriculum. Observed lessons aligned with explicit objectives which were posted in classrooms. Teachers created or modified existing packets that included graphic organizers, texts and problem sets.

Observers found students cognitively engaged by grade-level appropriate instruction. Students were uniformly focused on the learning activity. For example, students immediately responded to questions or picked up at the correct place during read alouds. In some classes, students were challenged to develop higher order thinking or problem solving skills. For example, in some cases students were expected to explain answers or solve word problems both orally and in writing. In other classes fast-paced questioning and assignments were observed that provided limited opportunities for students to respond in depth or justify their answers. In some classes there was a palpable urgency with teachers relying on leading questions to elicit correct answers and accepting one word answers, yet students did not demonstrate conceptual understanding during subsequent independent practice.

The school employs a number of strategies to meet the individual needs of students. Individual students and small groups are pulled for targeted assistance and tutoring and Saturday school are available. The director of curriculum provides teachers with ideas about how to differentiate materials with different classes. For example, the class with the lowest reading level had been using different text, but at the time of the visit was using the same book as the others. School leaders and teachers noted that instructions, quantity of material, difficulty of problems, length of reading passages and pacing can differ by packet and class.

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

#### **The school has strong instructional leadership.**

School leaders instill high expectations for teacher performance and student achievement. The school's teacher handbook includes clear expectations regarding teaching, tutoring and contact with families. The school has an explicit framework for instruction based on the "I-We-You" model and taxonomy practices. The principal looks for rigor in student work and responses, aiming to put them "on the path to suburban peers." One teacher said she chose to work at True North Troy because it is a "high standards, data-driven school."

Instructional leaders provide teachers with sustained and systematic support. They model for teachers how to develop curriculum units and lesson plans, review teachers' lessons and packets, and co-teach or model instruction. The principal and director of curriculum visit classes often. They provide informal feedback via e-mail and one-on-one check-ins with teachers. As the school grows, instructional leaders intend to establish a more formal structure for observations and feedback. In addition, as the school adds grades it intends to scale up teacher support by identifying department heads and grade leaders who can observe and model for other teachers.

Instructional leaders conduct regular evaluations that accurately identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation process incorporates instructional leaders' observations and feedback with teacher self-assessments. At the time of the visit some mid-year evaluations had been conducted with more scheduled in the near future. Reviewed evaluations were detailed and annotated. Teachers felt they were fair and useful.

Teachers are held accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. School leaders described explicit written communications with teachers identifying problems and areas for improvement; they noted that one teacher was let go for not making sufficient progress despite significant support.

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

**The school is effective in helping students who are struggling academically.**

The school has evolving but effective procedures for identifying at-risk students. As the school is relatively small in its first year, staff participates in frequent informal conversations about students as well as more formal discussions of student performance data. At the time of the visit five students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and none were English language learners.

The school provides sufficient resources and supports to meet the needs of at-risk students. The special education teacher pulls students for small group instruction. Tutoring is provided by teachers in English language arts and mathematics during breakfast and enrichment classes and after school. Some students are also pulled for writing support during book club. The school also offers an optional Saturday school for students who need additional support. Observed classes were primarily teacher-centered whole-class instruction with support for individual students taking place primarily outside general education classes.

The school adequately monitors the progress and success of at-risk students. As noted, the school makes extensive use of formative and summative assessments to identify students and target assistance. Teachers are provided with sufficient support to help them meet the needs of at-risk students. The special education teacher initially provides classroom teachers with information about students' IEPs and necessary accommodations and also updates teachers about progress made during the year.

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

**The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.**

True North Troy is safe and orderly. The school -- committed to the core values of respect, responsibility, compassion, diligence, perseverance and integrity -- acclimated students to its behavioral expectations, routines and procedures at the beginning of the year. At the time of the visit students appeared to have internalized the school's routines and procedures. Transitions in public spaces were silent and efficient and under the constant supervision of adults.

Teachers have effective classroom management and routines that promote learning. Teachers use a variety of techniques to focus students on learning within their classrooms including: chanting; prompting; high energy instructions; cold calling and praise; as well as repetition of consequences for misbehavior.

The school has a clear discipline system in place that is consistently applied. Each student starts the week with 50 "scholar dollars" and may lose or earn dollars based on behavior. Students who lose all of their scholar dollars lose privileges and are expected to complete a process to "earn their way back with the team." Students earn privileges such as special activities and can participate in auctions using their scholar dollars. The school has worked hard to develop clear expectations for behavior such that teachers appropriately and consistently deduct for infractions. Students are provided with opportunities to "re-set behavior" before being sent out of a classroom. If they are, the dean of students follows up with teachers about the subsequent consequences. Most suspensions were reported to have occurred at the beginning of the year as students were acclimating to the

school's culture and behavioral expectations. The school leader noted that alternative instruction is provided.

*Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)*

**The school has a comprehensive professional development program.**

During the summer, teachers learn the school's behavioral and instructional expectations (the taxonomy), and analyze state standards and assessments. During the school year 2.5 hours are dedicated on Fridays to whole staff training, data or lesson protocols or department meetings. The school also uses video to analyze and discuss instruction. Focus at the beginning of the year was on developing consistency in routines and procedures but at the time of the visit was transitioning to improving instructional techniques. School leaders determine professional development needs based on classroom observations as well as external evaluations by Uncommon Schools, Inc. ("USI"), the not-for-profit charter management organization with which the school contracts.

The school successfully develops the competencies and skills of all teachers. Informal goals are set through classroom observations and feedback, and teachers reported that opportunities exist to request specific topics for professional development. According to the principal, as the school grows professional development will be run more by subject area teachers.

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

**The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.**

The school has faithfully followed its mission and key design elements. The importance and expectation of attending and succeeding in college is evident throughout the building. Double periods of English language arts and mathematics are being employed to develop foundational skills toward that goal. The school has developed a structured learning environment in which assessment data drives programmatic and instructional decisions.

*Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)*

As this was the school's first year of operation, there was limited evidence regarding family satisfaction. At the time of the visit the school reported that no formal grievances had been filed. Student attrition is discussed below.

*Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)*

**The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program.**

The school's organizational structure supports distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The principal and director of operations both report to the managing director of USI's True North network of schools. In its first year of operation the school has a small leadership team, including the principal, dean of students, and directors of curriculum and special

education. In the future, as the school grows, plans are that the leadership team will expand to include department heads and grade team leaders.

The school is competently managed. The director of operations handles all non-academic matters and has modeled much of the school's systems and practices from True North Rochester, with adaptations made to fit the local context. Despite low enrollment, the school budget has supported the core academic program. The school has an adequate facility for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade and is pursuing other spaces to accommodate future growth. The school also benefits from its relationship with USI, which assists in staff recruitment and facilities. The True North managing director visits the school at least weekly and is in constant communication with the school leader. Staff members and teachers have peers at other schools in the Uncommon Network with whom to share and learn.

The school has hired and retained quality staff. The board noted its involvement in selecting the principal, who had taught at the True North flagship school in Rochester and spent a year as an instructional fellow at that and other schools developing leadership skills and planning True North Troy. USI assists with teacher recruitment. The principal noted that he interviewed approximately 100 of the 400 applicants for teaching positions. As noted above one teacher was let go during the year.

The school has been challenged to maintain sufficient enrollment. School leaders reported utilizing a variety of recruitment strategies including bus and radio advertisements, direct mail and newsletters. School leaders said that they have met with community leaders as well. The school had a goal of 75 students; it began the year with 68 and enrolled 55 at the time of the visit. The school leader indicated most students left at the beginning of the year; reasons given for their departure included culture fit, long day, and moving away. The school does not have a waitlist; it will backfill spaces in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade next year if possible. The board is aware of the enrollment problem and has made adjustments to the budget, including planning to reduce classes per grade next year; it anticipates increased enrollment as the school becomes more established in the community and has state test results to demonstrate success.

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

The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and provide oversight.

The school's board members have adequate skills and have put in place structures and procedures with which to effectively govern the school. Board members possess expertise in a variety of relevant areas, including education, business, real estate, non-profit management and governance, and community relations. The board meets approximately every other month and utilizes a committee structure, e.g., education, finance, membership and development. Priorities have focused on start-up issues and meeting topics have included program implementation, facilities, budget, enrollment and attendance. The board has a clear understanding of its role in setting policy and monitoring implementation without micromanaging its school leader or management organization.

The board receives regular information focused on student achievement. A dashboard is used to provide data on student performance, finances, enrollment and attendance. Terra Nova and interim assessment data is reviewed and compared to other schools. School leaders provide the board with regular updates on topics such as reading levels, discipline, community relations and compliance issues. The True North managing director is on the board and serves as a liaison to USI.

The board holds school leaders, its management organization and itself accountable for student achievement. The True North managing director evaluates the school leader and provides the results to the board. Uncommon Schools also evaluates the school and provides its findings to the board.

### **Conduct of the Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at True North Troy Charter School on March 18, 2010. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

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

**Maya Lagana** is an Analyst for School Evaluation for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. She is responsible for scheduling ongoing school evaluation visits, communicating with school team members and administrative staff regarding site visit logistics and requirements, developing and disseminating RFP documents, and coordinating the recruitment and work of consultants. Ms. Lagana worked for New Visions for Public Schools, Achievement First and Boston Collegiate Charter School while in graduate school. Previously, Ms. Lagana was an Assessment Specialist at the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence in Washington D.C., where she helped to develop teacher certification exams and analyzed item level statistics and demographics information. In addition to her extensive background as an analyst, Ms. Lagana also has experience as a third grade classroom teacher at P.S. 195 through the New York City Teaching Fellows Program. Ms. Lagana received her Master of Public Administration degree in Policy Analysis from New York University's Wagner School for Public Service, her Masters of Education degree from Mercy College and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Carleton College.

**Jason Sarsfield** is a Senior Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York, responsible for reviewing school applications, analyzing data to identify critical issues for renewal visit teams, monitoring the development of all renewal recommendation reports and supporting the development, refinement, and revision of internal policies and practices of the Institute's renewal process. Mr. Sarsfield returns to the Institute from the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning in the Bronx, NY, where he supervised the administration of standardized assessments, conducted analysis of student achievement data for purposes of program evaluation, and oversaw the development and submission of reports to state, federal and local agencies. Prior to his service at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning, he served as a Senior Analyst at the SUNY Charter Schools Institute, where he provided leadership for annual and informal school evaluation

visits. Before moving to New York to work for the Institute, Mr. Sarsfield was a contract analyst for the Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University, where he evaluated the academic performance of authorized charter schools and provided technical assistance for school improvement initiatives and the analysis of student achievement data. Mr. Sarsfield also served as a teacher and coach for Bad Axe Public Schools in Michigan and was a teacher at a residential high school in rural Alaska. Mr. Sarsfield received his Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Northern Michigan University and is a candidate for a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.

### ***External Consultants***

**Theodore Swartz** was the lead applicant for the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. Dr. Swartz was a first grade teacher during Bronx Better Learning's first two years of operation. Since then he served as the school's Executive Director for three years and then as a Senior Staff Development Specialist. He is currently the school's Interim Executive Director. Previous to his involvement with Bronx Better Learning, he served as the Superintendent and Principal of a one-school, 400 student, K-8 district in New Jersey. Under Dr. Swartz's leadership, the district established a strong track record of academic success, including its achieving the distinction of being the school, among 21 in the county, with the highest percentage of students meeting state standards in all sections tested, on both the fourth grade and the eighth grade statewide assessments. With a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, Special Education, from New York University, Dr. Swartz has served at many levels in a wide variety of school settings, including: an elementary and intermediate school teacher in the Bushwick and Ocean Hill-Brownsville sections in Brooklyn; a special education teacher in an elementary school on Staten Island; an educational consultant in reading and writing in elementary schools in East Harlem and the South Bronx; an adjunct assistant and associate professor of English, including remedial reading and writing, with the City University of New York; the principal of an elementary school in Putnam County, New York; a school director and Assistant Superintendent in a large, county-wide district mainly serving special student populations in Bergen County, New Jersey.

**APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

achieve those priorities;

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