



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# **Achievement First Brownsville Charter School**

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## **School Evaluation Report 2010-11**

Visit Date: April 12, 2011

Report Issued: September 12, 2011

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## INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“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 State University 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:

- **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 SUNY 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.
- **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.

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. A summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations is also provided, if applicable, as background and context for the current evaluation. 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. Finally, in a third section entitled School Evaluation Visit, this report presents the analysis of evidence collected during an evaluation visit conducted in the current school year, with an italicized paragraph that introduces each specific benchmark and provides a summarizing conclusion.

Because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this 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 notes 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.

## **Background**

Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are organized by 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.

This is an analysis of the observations and conclusions from this year's evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Some benchmarks are covered in greater detail than others in an effort to highlight areas of concern at the school and provide additional feedback in these areas. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team, is provided.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

The Charter Schools Institute contracted with an external school evaluator, Classmeasures, who conducted a school visit to Achievement First Brownsville Charter School (“A.F. Brownsville”) on May 18-19, 2010. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. Following the 2010 renewal evaluation visit, a report was provided to the school’s board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit. The conclusions provided at that time are briefly summarized below.

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

A. F. Brownsville regularly administered a series of standards based assessments, including interim assessments. Assessment data from the STEP literacy program and the A.F. Brownsville Interim Assessments were the primary assessments used at the school for evaluating student progress and modifying instruction to meet student needs.

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

A. F. Brownsville had developed a well-defined state-aligned curriculum for each grade and core academic subject.

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

High quality instruction was evident throughout the school. Instruction was differentiated to meet the individual needs of students, and students were challenged to demonstrate evidence of higher order thinking.

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

A. F. Brownsville had strong leadership in place, and the school leader had established an environment of high expectations for student achievement. There were comprehensive systems in place for both supporting and evaluating teachers.

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

A. F. Brownsville allocates sufficient resources to dealing with at-risk students. The student support system was structured such that struggling students receive differentiated instruction in-class, as well as pull-out services. Teachers worked collaboratively to identify and support at-risk students.

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

A. F. Brownsville was safe and orderly with classroom culture that was strongly focused on learning, respect and citizenship. There was a uniform discipline policy employed throughout the school.

### **Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)**

A. F. Brownsville had a comprehensive professional development program in place to support its teaching staff. Both the school and the CMO provided time and resources to develop teacher skill sets.

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

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a school evaluation visit to Achievement First Brownsville Charter School (“A.F. Brownsville”) on April 12, 2011. A.F. Brownsville is in its fourth year of operation and in the fourth year of its current five year accountability period. Based on the analysis of evidence from the evaluation visit, A.F. Brownsville’s is on a trajectory toward meeting its Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (a component of the Renewal Benchmarks) by establishing systems and procedures for an effective instructional program. This conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators discussed more fully later in the report. Some of the more salient indicators include the following:

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

A. F. Brownsville has a system to gather formative and summative assessments, evaluate data and use the data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.

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

A. F. Brownsville has a well-defined mathematics curriculum which is aligned to state performance standards; however, the school does not yet have a well-defined English language arts curriculum aligned to state performance standards.

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

Quality instruction is generally evident throughout the school. Teachers implement purposeful lessons with objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum and maximize learning time by promoting efficient transitions between instructional activities and student engagement.

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

A. F. Brownsville has strong instructional leadership. The principal, through the school’s coaches, instills high expectations for teacher performance and student achievement. The school’s instructional coaches provide teachers with sustained and systematic support by providing frequent and meaningful feedback on their professional growth.

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

A. F. Brownsville is helping students who are struggling academically. The school has a complex set of procedures for identifying these students, and it actively monitors their progress and success.

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

A. F. Brownsville promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The school is safe and orderly.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

### Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	October 26, 2007
Date Initial Charter Approved by Board of Regents	January 15, 2008
School Opening Date	September, 2008

### Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades At Location	District
2008-09 to present	2021 Bergen St. Brooklyn, NY	All	New York City CSD 23

### Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	Achievement First, Inc.	CMO	2007 - present

### Current Mission Statement

The mission of Achievement First Brownsville Charter School is to provide students with the academic and character skills they need to excel in top colleges, to succeed in a competitive world, and to serve as the next generation of leaders in their communities.

### Current Key Design Elements

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An unwavering focus on breakthrough student achievement, including fully closing the achievement gap;</li> <li>• Consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum, including that what is taught at every grade level is defined clearly and systematically so that all essential content is mastered over time;</li> <li>• Interim assessments and strategic use of performance data, including standards-based assessments administered ever 6 weeks in all of the core subject and individual instructional plans developed in conjunction with school leaders for each teacher based on assessment results;</li> <li>• More time on task, including three hours daily for reading instruction in elementary grades and three hours of instruction in reading and writing in the middle school grades;</li> <li>• Principals with the power to lead;</li> <li>• Increased supervision of the quality of instruction, including a School Manager to handle operational issues, a Dean of Students to coordinate discipline, and an Academic Dean in the school's second year, all of which will free up the Principal to focus on instruction;</li> <li>• Aggressive recruitment of teaching talent;</li> <li>• Disciplined, achievement-oriented school culture;</li> <li>• Rigorous high-quality, focused training for principals and leaders, including a "residency" year before implementing the program and a minimum of 3 weeks of high-quality professional development before the school year begins for all teachers; and</li> <li>• Parents and community as partners, including parent "contracts."</li> </ul> |
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## School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2008-09	84	168	191	5-6	K-1	195
2009-10	165	249	247	5-7	K-2	195
2010-11	411	342	339	K-3,5	K-3	195

## Student Demographics

	2008-09 <sup>2</sup>		2009-10 <sup>3</sup>	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 23 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 23 Enrollment
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5	0	0	0
Black or African American	92.8	81	93.1	81
Hispanic	6.1	17	5.6	17
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0.5	1	1.2	1
White	0	1	0	1
Multiracial	0	0	0	0
<b>Special Populations</b>				
Students with Disabilities <sup>4</sup>	6	N/A	7	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0	4	0	4
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>				
Eligible for Free Lunch	60	75	71	80
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	16	7	11	5

<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: 2008-09 New York State Report Cards.

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2009-10 New York State Report Cards.

<sup>4</sup> New York State Education Department does not report special education data. Statistics provided by the school.



### Current Board of Trustees<sup>5</sup>

<b>Board Member Name</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Position/Committees</b>
Kelly Wachowicz	July 2011	Chair
Chrystal Stokes Williams	July 2011	Treasurer
Lee Gelernt	July 2011	Secretary
Charmaine Bobb	July 2011	Parent Representative
Max Polaner	July 2011	Achievement First Representative
Vanessa Jackson	July 2011	Trustee
Amy Arthur Samuels	July 2011	Trustee
Nicole Campbell	July 2011	Trustee

### School Leader(s)

<b>School Year</b>	<b>School Leader(s) Name and Title</b>
2008-09	Gina Musumeci, Principal
2009-10	Gina Musumeci, Principal
2010-11	Gina Ribiero, Principal

### School Visit History

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Visit Type</b>	<b>Evaluator (Institute/External)</b>	<b>Date</b>
2008-09	First Year Visit	Institute	March 3, 2009
2009-2010	Second Year Visit	External	May 19, 2011
2010-2011	Third Year Visit	Institute	April 12, 2011

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Institute Board Records.

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

### **Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence**

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

*A.F. Brownsville has a system to gather formative and summative assessments, evaluate data and use the data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.*

A. F. Brownsville administers a variety of assessments including Interim Assessment (IAs), the Fountas and Pinnel and STEP literacy assessments; curriculum based end-of-unit assessments, the nationally-normed TerraNova assessment as well as informal daily assessments such as “exit tickets.” Math assessments are aligned to the school’s curriculum and state performance standards; the school is moving toward aligning its English language arts assessments with state performance standards. The school also systematically collects valid and reliable writing prompt data.

The school also possesses a well-defined system for managing and analyzing data. IAs are regularly analyzed at the school, class and student levels with support from the school’s charter management organization (CMO)\*. Results of these analyses are used to set school-wide and grade team performance goals. The school is particularly effective at using assessment data to address individual student needs. STEP test results were also analyzed in order to diagnose incoming students and preemptively address any deficiencies early in the school year.

The school uses assessment results to systematically improve instruction. Teachers whose methods have resulted in high student IA scores are encouraged to share strategies with other teachers on their grade teams. These strategies are then implemented grade-wide. In addition, teachers use informal assessment data to gather feedback on how well students understood the day’s lesson content and determine which objectives need re-teaching and to which students.

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

*A. F. Brownsville has a well-defined mathematics curriculum which is aligned to state performance standards; however, the school does not yet have a well-defined English language arts curriculum aligned to state performance standards.*

A. F. Brownsville is developing process for designing and modifying its curriculum. The school uses a combination of curricular programs to create the overall school curriculum. The English Language Arts framework is balanced between purchased programs for phonics and guided reading; whereas, the math curriculum is a hybrid of the CMO-created curriculum and another purchased curriculum. School leaders modify these frameworks twice monthly based on the results of IAs in order to better focus on the needs of the students. While the math curriculum is aligned to state standards, the consistently modified ELA curriculum is not yet monitored for alignment with the standards.

Both the school’s English Language Arts and math teachers know what to teach and when to teach it due to significant common planning time and a shared curriculum. Grade-level leaders provide

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\* A. F. Brownsville’s CMO is Achievement First, Inc.

support to all teachers regarding what to include in daily lesson plans. Teachers have adequate instructional materials aligned to the school's limited curriculum framework, and grade-level leaders provide additional materials at teachers' requests. Detailed minute-by-minute lesson plans are required of every teacher, and these plans are regularly reviewed by the school's curriculum coach.

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

*Quality instruction is generally evident throughout the school. Teachers implement purposeful lessons with objectives aligned to the school's curriculum and maximize learning time by promoting efficient transitions between instructional activities and student engagement.*

Observed instruction includes elements of direct instruction, small group instruction, student-to-student dialogue and independent practice. Teachers focus heavily on literacy, even during non-English Language Arts classes. The school focuses on individual student needs by placing students into groups based on reading level. Teachers challenge students with higher-order questions and consistently use questioning techniques that require students to provide evidence for their answers. Rigorous instruction is evident in the school's upper grades; lessons are lengthy with teachers posing open-ended questions to students, requiring significant analysis and concentration.

Instruction is fast-paced, and both teachers and students transitioned from one activity to another with a sense of urgency. Students are on-task and engaged with instruction. Observed teacher require students to maintain "learning positions" e.g. sitting up straight with pencils ready, thus prompting them when to listen, talk or take notes. Students were highly verbal during lessons, with teachers providing rapid feedback to correct incorrect responses.

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

*A.F. Brownsville has strong instructional leadership. The principal, through the school's coaches, instills high expectations for teacher performance and student achievement. The school's instructional coaches provide teachers with sustained and systematic support by providing frequent and meaningful feedback on their professional growth.*

The school has an actively engaged principal, two academic deans, and a dean of culture who all support teachers in their classrooms. Teachers report that the school's principal is the overall school leader and that she continuously provides informal feedback. Teachers also report that academic deans provide assistance with analyzing assessment results, pinpointing appropriate instructional strategies and reviewing daily lesson plans.

Teachers are held accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. Coaches, who are part of the administrative team, conduct regular observations and provide teachers with feedback that accurately identifies their instructional shortcoming and provides strategies to ameliorate shortcomings. School coaches also monitor IA results and set goals for improving teacher instruction and student achievement.

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

*A. F. Brownsville is helping students who are struggling academically. The school has a complex set of procedures for identifying these students, and it actively monitors their progress and success.*

A. F. Brownsville has a comprehensive program to identify students with special needs, and teachers are also provided with sufficient support to help them meet their needs. Teachers report that there is a process for identifying academically struggling students and “tiered” intervention strategies to serve them, including small group interventions and after school tutoring. At-risk students are identified through initial diagnostics, IAs and underperformance in the classroom. The teacher reports the names of these students to the grade-level leader, who works with the school’s special education teacher in order to develop intervention strategies to assist them. Tier 1 includes in class interventions; tier 2, assistance from the special education teacher; and, in tier 3, students are flagged for a special education evaluation.

The school provides sufficient resources and support to meet the needs of at-risk students. In addition to supporting classroom teachers with in-class, afterschool and pull-out strategies for struggling students, a special education program is in place with additional support for students falling into the “tier 3” provided through a contracted vendor. The grade-level leader, special education teacher and classroom teacher meet regularly to monitor the progress of all students receiving special interventions.

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

*A. F. Brownsville promotes a culture of learning and scholarship. The school is safe and orderly.*

Students follow a set of school-wide rules and procedures, and teachers have effective classroom management and routines that encourage learning. The school-wide discipline system is displayed throughout the building and includes consequences for poor choices and rewards for making the “right choice.” The system has been normed through extensive professional development, and teachers throughout the school implement it consistently.

The school’s college prep theme is present throughout the school. The walls are decorated with various college symbols, and teachers reference college frequently, discussing both their own college experiences as well as the amount of college necessary to pursue certain careers.

### **Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)**

*A. F. Brownsville has a comprehensive professional development program. 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.*

Teachers engage in professional development sessions for two hours every Friday afternoon. These sessions are structured by the principal and the schools’s CMO and are frequently modified to meet teacher needs. The sessions focus on individual teacher needs, and teachers are grouped by either grade or content levels for professional development sessions, depending on which grouping is most relevant.

The school successfully develops teacher competencies and skills. In addition to these structured sessions, the school’s coaching system aims at helping teacher increase their skill level. Coaches focus on the skills of individual teachers and provide strategies for improvement. The school also supports school-wide data training sessions in which teachers are trained on how to use data to improve instruction.

## **Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)**

*Through the leadership of its principal, A. F. Brownsville has established a particularly well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program*

A. F. Brownsville is competently managed. The school's CMO hires quality staff, and it takes an active role in ensuring that the principal is well supported. The school has also maintained sufficient enrollment. The principal continually monitors and evaluates the school's programs and makes changes if necessary. Using data, the principal works with the school leadership team to constantly re-evaluate the school's goals and define new instructional "aims" for teachers. The organizational structure supports distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, with academic deans reporting that each teacher has a coach and each coach reports to the appropriate academic dean. While the teachers are held accountable for student achievement, the coaches are held responsible for "pushing" teachers toward improved performance.

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

*A.F. Brownsville's board provides oversight to the educational program.*

Board members have a strong combination of education, business, law and finance experience. The board chair reports that the board closely monitors the school's financial activity and that they have a strong commitment to supporting the needs of the teachers and providing them with the supplies and materials necessary to deliver an effective education program.

The board holds the school's leader, CMO and itself accountable for student achievement. The board chair reports there are consistent and ongoing processes for the principal to update the board. The principal regularly and consistently emails the board chair and provides an update to the board during scheduled board meetings. The board chair reports that the board, in conjunction with Achievement First, is in the process of completing the cumulative end-of-year principal evaluation. The principal reports that she knows, understands and is aware of this evaluation process.

## **Conduct of the Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at Achievement First Brownsville Charter School on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

**Team Leader: Ron Miller, Ph.D.** is the Vice President for Accountability at the Charter Schools Institute. After teaching for seven years in New York City public schools, Dr. Miller joined the central offices of the New York City Department of Education, where he conducted evaluative research and organizational studies. As Director of the Office of School Planning and Accountability, he served as the educational accountability officer for the Department. In that capacity, he developed school accountability reports for the city schools and coordinated staff development on their use for district administrators in all the high school and community school districts. In addition, he worked with school leaders to develop their competence to use data for school improvement. In this role he developed PASS, a school performance review system which was adopted in 600 city schools. Dr. Miller has regularly presented papers at annual meetings of the

American Educational Research Association and has served as Adjunct Assistant Professor at Teachers College Columbia University and Pace University. He holds a BA degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology from Columbia University

**Institute Team Member: Paul Wright, Ed. D.** was recently appointed Director of School Evaluation at the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. Dr. Wright will be responsible for the Institute's extensive school evaluation program, overseeing and in many cases leading school evaluation visits by Institute staff as well as coordinating the independent evaluations done on the Institute's behalf. Dr. Wright will lead ongoing efforts to refine the Institute's nationally regarded evaluation protocols and reporting tools; including oversight of the production of the Institute's school evaluation reports which provide valuable information to schools and the public about school progress. He will also coordinate internal staff training on school evaluation. Prior to joining the Institute, Dr. Wright directed Quality Education Partnership, Inc., a national consulting network that conducted evaluations of traditional and charter schools and created strategic management plans for school improvement. The former Development Director for School Design and Strategic Planning of Mesa Public Schools in Arizona, Dr. Wright developed unique schools of choice serving a wide spectrum of learners in coordination with Mesa Public Schools. Dr. Wright also served as Vice President for Student Services at the Leona Group, an Educational Management Organization providing educational services to students throughout Arizona. Dr. Wright received his Ed. D. and his M.Ed. from Arizona State University and his B.A. in Psychology from the State University of New York at Albany.

**External Team Member: Wilma Cordero** was an American History/Social Studies teacher and department leader for over 20 years in the New York City public school system. In this capacity she developed rigorous and creative curriculum units for heterogeneous classes, team-taught, supervised student teachers and mentored new teachers. During the last 15 years she has worked as a consultant doing research and evaluations for the New York City Department of Education (DOE). She is currently involved in conducting an evaluation of the Bilingual/ESL Teacher Leadership Academy program at Bank Street College. Ms. Cordero has also provided consultant services for John Schoener and Associates, Inc. evaluating education programs such as *New Beginnings*, an alternative program for high school students and *Reading First*, an early childhood literacy program. She holds a Masters degree in Political Science from the New School for Social Research. She is also the co-author of *Breaking Away from the Textbook: A Creative Approach to Teaching American History* (2006, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). The book provides teachers with strategies and activities to fill the gaps left by traditional textbooks and curricula, and is widely used by teachers across the US and in other countries.

**External Team Member: Ayanna Taylor** taught Language Arts at Martin Luther King, Jr. School in Paterson, NJ as a Teach for America corps member and served as a member of the School Improvement Team. Ayanna was the founding Director of College Placement & College Liaison at North Star Academy Charter School of Newark. She founded and directed North Star's college placement program, taught high school English, and founded/coached the North Star Step Team. Ms. Taylor achieved a 100% college acceptance and college matriculation rate for North Star's first three graduating classes. Ms. Taylor worked as Associate Director for the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association, an editor with Pearson Education in their Globe Fearon division. Ms. Taylor has also worked as an instructional strategies specialist with a NJ-based educational consulting firm, working on district-wide initiatives to implement problem-based learning, data-driven instruction, and small learning communities. Most recently, she was the Director of Alumni Affairs for the

Newark region of Teach For America. In that role, she managed the regional alumni stewardship efforts. Currently, she is the founder and principal advisor of Access Educational Advisors, a New Jersey-based consulting firm that supports the educational design and programming efforts of charter schools. She also serves as a managing director at the Community Charter School Collaborative a non-profit support network for community-based charter schools. She is a graduate of the Leadership Newark fellowship. Ms. Taylor received an M.A. in Public Administration from Rutgers University Newark and completed coursework towards a Masters Degree in African American Studies at Columbia University.

**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>  <b>Use of Assessment Data</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>State University Renewal Benchmark 1C</b>  <b>Curriculum</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 materials) currently in use in relation to the school’s curriculum framework,</li> </ul>



	<p>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 development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers;</li> </ul>

	<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><u>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</u></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> <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</li> </ul>

	<p>and staff interests;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>	
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<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
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<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2A</b></p> <p><b>Mission &amp; Key Design Elements</b></p>	<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>
<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2B</b></p> <p><b>Parents &amp; Students</b></p>	<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>

<p><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Organizational Capacity</b></p>	<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> <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> </ul>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2D  Board Oversight</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>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 style="text-align: center;"><b>State University Renewal Benchmark 2E  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 achieve those priorities;</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

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.