



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

BRONX CHARTER SCHOOL FOR EXCELLENCE

Evaluation Report 2005-2006

August 2006

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Reader's Guide

Background on Charter Schools and the State University

Charter schools are public schools that operate independently and autonomously of local school districts and are created by civic leaders, community groups, educators and parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities and improving student achievement, particularly for children at-risk of academic failure. The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 authorizes the creation of charter schools.

Under the Charter Schools Act, the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor) have the power to create charter schools and thereafter to renew charters of successful schools. Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in their responsibilities under the act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as applications to renew the charters of existing charter schools. In each case the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of State University charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees which is directly responsible for school performance. That board, while independent, is subject to public oversight. Just as traditional school boards, charter schools' boards of trustees must adhere to New York State's Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools and their boards are also subject to oversight and monitoring. In the case of the State University authorized schools, that monitoring is conducted by the Institute. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

Charter schools are also accountable for performance. In exchange for the freedom from many state rules and regulations that the Charter Schools Act provides, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its "Accountability Plan," as well as standards regarding its fiscal, legal and organizational effectiveness, or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed. This tradeoff—freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure—is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools administered by traditional school districts.

The State University Trustees' Oversight Process

The State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan (which is contained in the schools' charter itself) and other methods.

In addition to monitoring a school's compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them. By providing this oversight and feedback, the State University Trustees and the Institute seek to accomplish three goals.

The first goal is to facilitate improvement. By providing substantive information about the school's 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 to recognize those strengths and weaknesses. Of course, whether the school actually takes corrective actions, and more importantly, effective corrective action, remains the school's responsibility given that it is an independent and autonomous school.

The second goal is to disseminate information about the school's performance beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. Ideally this information, including the present report, should help parents make choices about whether a school is serving their children well and/or is likely to continue to do so in the future. For this reason, this report (and others like it) is posted on the Institute's website and the school is asked to inform parents of its posting. By providing parents with more information, the State University hopes to enhance the market accountability to which charters are subject: if they do not attract and retain sufficient numbers of students who want the product they are providing, they go out of business.

The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a database of the school's progress over time. By evaluating the school periodically, the Institute is better able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school—and the likelihood for continued success or failure. Having information based on past patterns, the Institute and the State University Trustees are better positioned to make respectively recommendations and decision on whether a school's charter should be renewed. In turn, a school will also have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

Evaluation Visits and Reports

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. This evaluation report is a product of one of those visits.

In evaluating schools, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit. How these

benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

In particular, and as this report demonstrates, the Institute uses a series of qualitative indicators to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), these benchmark indicators are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the state's 3rd - 8th grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on "how" the school is doing but also "why" it is succeeding or failing.¹

Over time of course, and particularly at the school's initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators, student test scores, take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools are responsible for results (outcome measures).

However, while decisions at renewal in subsequent renewal cycles involving the effectiveness of the educational program are determined almost solely by its students' collective performance on standardized tests during the most recent charter period, the Institute continues to use the qualitative benchmarks regarding the educational program's effectiveness. The reason for this is that it can give the school (and parents and other stakeholders) information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance if such is the case.

The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of Evaluation Visits

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with a particular year in the renewal cycle. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be facing renewal, having been renewed previously only for two years. It will therefore receive a renewal evaluation visit, whereas another school that was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and follow-up report, which all schools in that position receive.

As such, each of the Institute's evaluation reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school. This [chart](#) is set forth in the following section and is linked to the Institute's evaluation protocols, which indicate in what years the Institute conducts evaluation and renewal inspections.

¹ More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

The Present Report

The information contained within this report is the result of evidence obtained during the Institute's visit to the Bronx Charter School for Excellence conducted in the spring of the school's second year of operation. In addition to this reader's guide, the report includes a brief description of the school, a summary of the Institute's conclusions from the previous visit to the school, conclusions and analysis from the present visit, a subset of the benchmarks utilized by the inspection team as the lens through which the school was examined and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the visitors and the date of the visit.²

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two to four member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute's evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment); the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline; and the fiscal soundness of the school. Issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), and where the Institute finds serious deficiencies in particular relating to student health and safety it may take additional and immediate action; however, monitoring compliance is not the principal purpose of the visit. Evaluation visits typically include a meeting with the principal/director, classroom visitations, and interviews of staff, students and board members, in addition to reviewing student work.

Keeping This Report in Context

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State University and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;

² The specific benchmarks that were used are attached to the report.

- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

Readers should also keep in mind the inherent limitations of a one-day visit, which provides only a snap-shot of the school on visit day. While the Institute is confident that the majority of its observations are “valid,” in that they reflect an underlying reality about the school’s academic and organizational structures, they are not perfect or error-free.

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance that the school is “on track” toward a subsequent renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement.

While there is no one rating that the Institute gives as a result of a single-day visit, it is important to note that where the inspection team identifies area after area with not just room for improvement but significant and severe deficiencies, and few, if any, countervailing strengths, the difficulty that the school may have in presenting a compelling case for renewal is likely to be substantially increased and this fact may well be noted. Conversely, where the inspection team finds that strengths outnumber weaknesses in both quantity and quality, the school is likely to be better positioned to build a strong case for renewal. So, too, this fact may be noted.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that this report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to stakeholders; and gathering data so that the Institute may come to renewal with a richer set of evidence) unless the report is not only unsparingly candid regarding the observations that the Institute has made, but also focused on those areas that are potentially in need of improvement rather than those accomplishments that the school has accumulated to date.

While this level of what can reasonably be termed “brutal honesty” is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding—and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not—but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

School Description and Background

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application for Bronx Charter School for Excellence (“Bronx Excellence”) on February 25, 2003, and it was approved by the New York State Board of Regents on April 29, 2003. After taking a planning year, the school opened in August of 2004 at 1508 Webster Avenue Bronx, New York, serving 100 students in Kindergarten and first grades. The school plans to grow one grade at a time, projecting an enrollment of 250 students in grades Kindergarten through four by the 2007-08 school year. If the school’s charter is renewed in 2008, the school anticipates growing to include Kindergarten through 8th grades

The mission statement for Bronx Excellence is as follows:

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

Bronx Excellence will achieve its mission through the following key design elements of the school:

- high academic standards;
- performance-based accountability;
- professional opportunities for teachers;
- clearly articulated behavior standards for students;
- small classes (only 50 students per grade level);
- extended day and year;
- dual leadership of an executive director and a principal; and
- school uniforms.

The curriculum includes language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, dance, music and the visual arts. According to the school’s initial charter application, the educational program exceeds the requirements of the New York State performance standards.

Initially, the school design stipulated the hiring of content-based teachers to establish subject-based classrooms to ensure transmittal of knowledge by a competent, subject-knowledgeable teacher. In this way the school sought to ensure a *depth* of content knowledge in order to provide students with a rigorous learning experience. The design was reconfigured in the second year, 2005-2006. At that time, Kindergarten, first and second grades moved forward with a new, and currently used, model of the self-contained traditional classroom configuration, with one teacher responsible for delivery of *all* subjects for that particular grade level. Bronx Excellence retained

Urban Educational Exchange (UEE) to facilitate delivery of the English language arts (ELA) curriculum and provide professional development. A Saxon Mathematics curriculum is in place school-wide. The after school program, currently for Kindergarten and first grade students who are academically “at-risk,” uses a program called Reading One-to-One (ROTO) which was chosen to strengthen and enhance student’s reading skills.

The lead initial charter applicant, who served as the school’s founder and executive director, resigned from this position in November 2005. She has not been actively involved in the school’s day-to-day operations since July of 2005. She retains her position as a voting member of the school’s Board of Trustees.

Enrollment

YEAR	ORIGINAL CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	APPROVED CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ORIGINAL CHARTERED GRADES SERVED	APPROVED GRADES SERVED	ACTUAL GRADES SERVED	COMPLYING
2003-2004	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Planning year	Yes
2004-2005	100	100	100	K-1	K-1	K-1	Yes
2005-2006	150	150	145 (10/19/05)	K-2	K-2	K-2	Yes
2006-2007	200	200		K-3			
2007-2008	250	250		K-4			

School Year (2005-06)

200 instructional days.

School Day (2005-06)

7:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
1 st Charter – 1st Year	2003-04	Planning year	None	None	None
1 st Charter – 2 nd Year	2004-05	1st	Yes	Letter	None
1 st Charter – 3 rd Year	2005-06	2 nd	Yes	Evaluation Report	None
1 st Charter – 4 th Year					
1 st Charter - 5th Year					

Summary of Previous Evaluation Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a visit of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence near the end of its first year of operation on May 25, 2005. Institute staff observed classrooms, met with administrators and interviewed teachers. In a letter to the school's board of trustees, the Institute reported the results of the school site visit which are briefly summarized below.

Institute staff noted that the curricula from Urban Education Exchange (UEE) and Saxon Mathematics appeared to be in place school-wide. Teachers appeared to have most materials, although the school needed reading materials to challenge higher-performing readers. Of concern to the inspectors at the visit was the school's lack of a writing program. While the school had developed an age-appropriate writing rubric, it did not have an explicit writing curriculum. Student writing consisted of journal writing, and teachers reported that they needed assistance in writing instruction. The principal was aware of this issue, and indicated to the visiting team that the UEE professional developer and a teacher planned to work together to create Bronx Excellence's writing curriculum during the summer (2005).

Teachers reported that classroom management was very problematic at the beginning of the school's first year, but during the school year significant progress was made to improve it through professional development given by UEE as part of its contract. While there was no longer "pandemonium," classroom management remained inconsistent. The departmentalized structure of Bronx Excellence brought up numerous organizational and instructional issues, such as young students having to endure numerous transitions during the school day, and working with several adults whose expectations were not consistent. In addition, ownership of the classroom was unclear and teachers' responsibility for students' achievement was diluted. School inspectors cautioned that this issue must be addressed or the situation may worsen as the school grew and as its students increased in age and number. Inspectors encouraged school leaders to give some thought to the role and extent the departmentalized structure may contribute to the school's student management difficulties.

To determine their literacy skills, students had taken numerous assessments, including the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Early Childhood Literacy Assessment Screening (ECLAS), Running Records, Gates-MacGinitie, and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). While the school was still in the process of determining the most appropriate assessments, inspectors questioned the need for so many assessments—especially as some of the assessments measure the same skills. There was no school-wide math assessment.

At the time of the first end-of-year visit, the school had already planned several changes that were to be implemented during the 2005-06 school year. These plans included that each classroom would be staffed by a teacher and an educational associate; that there would be a science teacher to teach all science classes at the school; and the hiring of an Academic Specialist to work with students who need additional support. The school also planned that all students would continue to participate in music, art, dance and physical education classes in the afternoon following the academic day.

During its first year, Bronx Excellence had a very inexperienced staff; none of the teachers had more than two years of teaching experience. As such, they had substantial professional development needs. The principal considered it his job to improve their pedagogy and reported that they were “great learners” and demonstrated improvement throughout the year.

To its credit, at the time of the first end-of-year visit, the school had offered substantial professional development to its teachers, particularly in the area of classroom management. Additionally, during its first year, the entire staff visited Harlem Day Charter School on a professional development day and the principal worked to assist teachers in building relationships with more experienced teachers.

UEE provided a designated teacher-trainer who was assigned to the school one day a week to work with the teachers and principal. She met with teachers once or twice per month, led ELA meetings that focused on the implementation of the curriculum, and observed lessons. In addition, she met with the principal each week to review teachers’ lessons and pedagogy. The UEE’s professional development model includes identifying and training a teacher at Bronx Excellence to eventually take on the role as the school’s UEE teacher trainer. School inspectors cautioned school leaders that due to its teachers’ extremely limited experience, they may be unprepared to take on such a leadership role.

In the Institute’s first year letter, it was noted that changes in deployment of staff created additional professional development needs. Because teachers would be responsible for delivery of multi-subject areas within their classrooms, further professional development was necessary to prepare teachers to successfully undertake this change. The school needed to consider this in developing its 2005-06 professional development plans.

In addition to professional development for teachers, the school also needed to focus on the professional development needs of the educational associates. The role of an educational associate is advertised as a step toward teaching, and educational associates, at that time, were identified as aspiring teachers, or individuals that the school was grooming to become teachers. However, the educational associates reported that the UEE professional developer worked primarily with teachers. The questions that were posed to the school at the end of the 2004-05 school year were: (1) If educational associates are truly expected to grow into teachers, what do they need to prepare for the role? And (2) How will the school support their development?

At the time of the first end-of-year visit, the school’s board of trustees met regularly, and had established committees, such as finance, facilities, real estate, education, audit and development. The Board had eight members, but planned to fill the fifteen seats allowed by its charter. The board received student academic performance and program related information from the principal’s reports to the board. There appeared to be ongoing communication between the board and the school leader, and the board indicated its awareness of its responsibility in holding the school leader accountable for student and school performance. The board had delegated the responsibility for evaluation of the principal to the executive director, but there was yet to be developed a formal protocol for this process or for the evaluation of the school’s executive director. As the school’s first year ended, the Institute strongly urged the board to ensure that it

address the critical responsibility of instituting a formal process/protocol for evaluating the executive director.

Executive Summary and Conclusions

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the present visit to the Bronx Charter School for Excellence on March 28, 2006. Inspectors visited classrooms, reviewed documents and interviewed instructional and administrative staff. Each of their conclusions is summarized below. The evidence base and further analysis is contained in the Benchmark Analysis and Evidence section.

Assessments and the Use of Assessment Data

As the Bronx Charter School for Excellence has just completed its second year and provided instruction only to Kindergarten, first and second graders, it cannot present achievement results on state examinations, which provide data for most of the measures in the subject area goals listed in the school's Accountability Plan. However, the school administers multiple assessments, the results of which must be interpreted with caution due to unreliable nature of testing young children. Notwithstanding this qualification, the available test data indicate that the school has not yet enabled students to acquire the basic early childhood skills necessary to succeed in the middle elementary grades.

While the school has multiple assessments as noted in the first year letter, at the time of the second year visit, Institute visitors were not convinced of the efficacy of the number or frequency of the assessments. The school's leadership may want to consider how assessment results are used to drive instruction and arrive at a common understanding of the capacity of the school's current assessment system for that purpose, and its effectiveness in moving the school toward fulfillment of its Accountability Plan goals and measures.

Curriculum and Instruction:

The school has identified and implemented curricular programs in English language arts and mathematics. The social studies program benefits from a scope and sequence developed by UEE. A writing curriculum and scope and sequence for the second grade exists, but a writing curriculum for Kindergarten, first, third or fourth still remains undeveloped. The team did not collect evidence about the science program.

Teachers' instructional expertise varies. Center activity and direct instruction appeared to take place in nearly all the newly created self-contained classrooms. Educational associates were, for the first time, included in the delivery of the academic program. There did not appear to be a proactive, systematic approach for inculcating instructional practices toward developing a competent teaching force vis-à-vis classroom observations, feedback and whole-school professional development seminars.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

Bronx Charter School for Excellence provides students with a core curriculum and multiple avenues for remediation for students most at risk of academic failure.

Professional Development

Bronx Excellence has a relatively novice teaching force that, for the first time, were responsible for delivering instruction in a grade specific array of content areas, and as such, a robust professional development regimen would seem appropriate. For the most part, professional development was delivered by UEE developers whose primary purpose is to gird the UEE curriculum, which is focused on literacy; therefore the professional development is most complete in the area of reading. Additionally, since teachers end their days at different times, the school was not able to provide professional development targeted at the faculty as a whole. The school may want to both re-design its schedule to include opportunities for all instructional staff to meet for professional development, and consider offering a proactive professional development plan in other areas such as math, social studies, writing and science.

Student Order and Discipline

Behavior expectations seemed to be consistent for all students in all classes. The new self-contained classrooms sponsored greater teacher ownership and accountability, thereby resulting in improved classroom management. Inspectors caution the school to continue to provide professional development for classroom teachers and educational associates in this area in order to maintain and increase the scholarly school culture. As the school grows in size and grades, the development of a student handbook might ensure a clear, consistent message to all members of the school community.

School Leadership

Prior to the start of the 2005-06 school year, the original founder and executive director of Bronx Excellence resigned, and the principal assumed many of those responsibilities, spending approximately 40% of his time in classrooms with teachers and 60% on operational issues, as well as reporting directly to the board. This change resulted in some confusion regarding school leadership and support for instruction. Teachers reported that the school leader did not devote sufficient attention to supporting curriculum and instruction. The principal stated, and teachers concurred, that the principal was overwhelmed by his duties which included supervision of the non-educational and administrative staff. The Board hired a search firm with plans to retain a new executive director that would fill the position before school ended in June 2006.

Governance

During the 2005-06 school year, the priorities of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence Board of Trustees primarily focused on the areas of development and the new Parkchester facility. The leadership and governance experienced significant change during the 2005-06 school year. The number of board members decreased and the school's executive director resigned. Of the two members of the academic committee, one recently resigned, thereby leaving the school's academic program vulnerable.

Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Assessment and Use of Assessment Data

For the 2005-06 school year, the internal assessment system of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence consisted of the following components:

- Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System – 2 (ECLAS-2);
- Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading and math;
- DIBELS;
- Running Records; and
- UEE Assessments.

As the Bronx Charter School for Excellence has just completed its second year and provided instruction only to Kindergarten, first and second graders, it cannot present achievement results on state examinations, which provide data for most of the measures in the subject area goals listed in the school's Accountability Plan. The school's achievement data are limited to results for Kindergarten and first grade on the ECLAS-2 and on the ITBS in reading and math.

In its Accountability Plan, the school includes ECLAS measures pertaining to early childhood literacy skill proficiency. In its first year, the school met the criterion of success in most of the skill areas for the Kindergarten and first grade ECLAS measures. While meeting most of the components of the stated measures is encouraging, the criterion of success set in the measures (75 percent at a designated performance level in each skill area in the spring) is not particularly ambitious. Virtually all students should be at Level 2 in Kindergarten. Indeed, in four of the Kindergarten skill areas, almost all students achieved Level 2 at the end of the school year. However, less than two-thirds of the students achieved Level 2 in the critical skill of letter recognition. Among the first graders, fewer than half the students achieved the requisite level (Level 4) in decoding. While the first grade students met the measure for sight words (76 percent at Level 4), practically all students are expected to achieve Level 4 in first grade.

The principal is aware of the need for remediation based on ECLAS results and stated that "Their decoding skills [2005-06 second grade students] are not good; they need more support." The school has two remediation programs: Academic Intervention Services (AIS) for second graders and Reading One-to-One (ROTO) for Kindergarten and first graders.

In its Accountability Plan Progress Report, the school discussed the increase in the percentage of students scoring at Levels 2 and 4 in Kindergarten and first grade, respectively, from the fall to spring administration of the assessment. While the cohorts of students show consistent gains across the skill areas, the results are to be expected to a large extent. Student cognitive development and time in school would inevitably lead to increases from fall to spring.

The Accountability Plan for the Bronx Charter School for Excellence also includes a value-added outcome measure based on ITBS results in reading and math. It sets as its goal that students will close the gap between their current level of performance and grade level or an NCE of 50, based on spring-to-spring reading and math test results. The only available value added

data is fall 2004 to spring 2005. Both Kindergarten and first grade students showed little change in the average NCE scores in the spring compared to the fall. However, it must be noted that experience with administering a norm-referenced test to young children generally shows that fall scores are suppressed because of a lack of familiarity with the test, thereby exaggerating spring gains. To put it differently, empirical evidence has shown that students are more likely to show fall to spring gains than the spring to spring gains. Considering the likelihood of exaggerated gains due to these two factors, the school would be expected to enable students to show greater fall to spring improvements than they did.

In sum, the student achievement results must be interpreted with caution because of the unreliable nature of testing young children. Notwithstanding this qualification, the available test data indicate that the school has not yet enabled students to acquire the basic early childhood skills to succeed in the middle elementary grades.

At the time of this visit, the first and second grade teachers administered the DIBELS assessment, and student running records. They also followed the advice of the UEE developer to group students for reading. Second grade teachers used the Saxon Mathematics weekly test results to determine items or skills they needed to re-teach. Those teachers dedicated one math session per week for that purpose. While teachers and administrators used, to some extent, the ECLAS-2 and ITBS test results in reading for student inclusion in remedial programs, it did not appear that teachers used test results to drive their instructional program nor did there appear a plan in place to improve deficit skills, such as student letter recognition of the first grade students or the deficit decoding skills of the second grade students (both measured by ECLAS). The reading skill deficits, unless aggressive remediation is provided by the school, do not set students on the path to achieve proficiency on the third grade state assessments or to meet the goals set in the school's Accountability Plan.

According to the principal, the school was recently awarded a grant to devise and implement an interim assessment program whereby students would be tested every six weeks-allowing teachers to then spend one week of review before teaching new skills. The principal conveyed that he and the teachers expected to develop these assessments during the upcoming weekends. The principal stated that he wanted to create a third grade test that mirrors the New York State standardized tests. He anticipated that this exam would be developed and ready to administer to second graders for the first time in June 2006. Additionally, students were reported to take quarterly (standardized) assessments given by Urban Education Exchange (UEE). Although Gates-MacGinitie was dropped from the assessment menu, it appears that the school continues to administer a variety of assessments. Although the Institute has questioned the need for the number of assessments, it is clearly the prerogative of the school. However, the school's leadership may want to consider how assessment results are used and arrive at a common understanding of the efficacy of the school's assessment system. In particular, the school may want to determine to what degree the assessment system is being effectively used to both identify gaps in teacher skill and student mastery of the curriculum and to move the school toward fulfillment of its Accountability Plan goals and measures.

Curriculum and Instruction

The curriculum of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence is anchored to the core subject areas of English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies and science. Based on information gathered during the end of year visit, it is clear that the English language arts component is significantly more defined than other subject areas. In terms of English language arts, since the school's startup, the school has contracted with the Urban Education Exchange (UEE). UEE provides curricular resources that are aligned with the New York State standards in reading (K-2) and writing (second grade only), such as a defined scope and sequence for ELA and a phonics program. In addition, during the 2005-06 school year, the UEE teacher-trainers helped determine reading groups in the 2nd grade, and collaborated in the development of the writing curriculum with the second grade teachers. In terms of support for instruction, UEE provided curriculum assistance for teachers four times a month, a teacher-trainer in the school on a weekly basis (often during grade level planning time), modeling of lessons on occasion, and teacher observations and feedback. The 2005-06 school year was the second year of the UEE contract, and the school plans for one Bronx Excellence teacher to develop a high level of expertise and assume the position of school-wide UEE curriculum trainer by the end of the fourth and final year of the UEE contract. By creating an in-house teacher trainer, the school would obviate the need for renewing the contract with UEE or another curriculum partner. The school did increase the ELA instructional time by one hour from the school's first year, which provided more time for students to be immersed in the curriculum.

Although the lack of a writing program was noted as a concern by the Institute in the school's first year letter, at the time of the second end of year visit, there was still no evidence of a school-wide writing curriculum, with the exception of the two second grade classes. The second grade teachers together with the UEE developer created a writing scope and sequence, during the summer of 2005, which they used in both second grade classrooms. That scope and sequence, however, was not aligned vertically (with either the prior or succeeding grades). School leaders stated that they are "trying to figure out a writing sequence for K-4." Second grade teachers also attempted to align the UEE writing genres with the state social studies curriculum for second grade. In addition, rubrics have been developed within each classroom to assess student writing; however, a school-wide rubric was not available. Institute visitors noted that 2nd grade writing on display was scored using performance levels of 1 – 4, but the rubric specifying the standards was not in evidence. A perusal of student writing workbooks, where students copied the morning message in a format specified by the teacher, found uncorrected mistakes. According to a teacher, written work on display was posted based on the principal's requirements.

The principal acknowledged that there should be a school-wide plan for writing and, per the UEE contract, it appeared they might bear some degree of responsibility for developing a writing curriculum. One teacher stated, "The only thing I would like to see more of is a writing sequence. It is not really flushed out yet." In the school's first year, the only writing exercise taking place in classrooms was student journal writing; a practice which remained intact during the 2005-06 school year.

In terms of mathematics, the school uses the Saxon Mathematics program. This program includes detailed lesson plans for each grade level and assessments in the form of unit tests. Second-grade teachers use the assessment benchmarks from Saxon Mathematics to determine

whether they needed to re-teach a skill; if so they re-taught at the end of the week before introducing new material. One Institute visitor noted that the limited mathematics work on display provided no evidence of work with word problems, and based on classroom observation, it appeared that some students experienced significant difficulty grasping the concepts needed to solve a word problem. This evidence leads the Institute to question whether the math curriculum goes beyond the drilling of basic facts and skills, and the rigor of the mathematics curriculum in general. The two second grade teachers planned together to ensure their pacing and instruction were similar. Based on the information provided to the visit team, there had been no professional development for mathematics, and a school-wide (Saxon) mathematics assessment was not apparent.

Teachers said that one of the greatest challenges of the school is the lack of a social studies curriculum. One teacher said they are reimbursed for resources they purchase, but the school does not allocate funds in the budget for teachers to develop a program with textbooks and other resources. Teachers indicated that the social studies curriculum is a “work in progress.” Teachers received a scope and sequence for the content area of social studies from UEE, and they “have talked about reorganizing the sequence to make sense of the themes.”

The school has experienced difficulty in the area of science. According to the principal, the school’s full-time science teacher relocated out of the state in October of 2005. The school hired a permanent substitute teacher to fill the position. To support instruction in this area, a school-wide schedule ensures that an educational associate is assigned to classrooms when a science lesson is conducted.

On a weekly basis, grade level teams have a one-hour scheduled planning time. Teachers found the hour inadequate to address their planning needs, and often planned after school. In addition, the hour is periodically taken by the UEE teacher trainer(s). UEE teacher trainer meetings follow a specific agenda which includes: follow-up from the previous week, discussion of school-wide standardized assessments and curriculum based segment.

Academic Attainment and Improvement

Bronx Charter School for Excellence provides students with a core curriculum and multiple avenues for remediation for students most at risk of academic failure. The school’s curriculum seeks to inculcate reading skills by the use of key elements of reading instruction, such as letter-sound knowledge, phonemic awareness skills, and decoding skills with the use of leveled reading books. The school offers two options for reading remediation. One option is a class for “at-risk” second graders. This class is staffed, however, by personnel at the school who have little experience with “at-risk” programs intended to develop and deliver an ongoing, intense and focused remedial plan to ensure that students quickly reach grade level by the shortest possible route. For its second option, the school uses the ROTO program in its after-school program for Kindergarten and first grade students. The program is delivered by volunteer high school tutors Monday through Thursday under the direction of several classroom teachers. During the one and one-half hour after school program, two forty-five minute reading sessions are conducted.

Some teachers and the principal believe the program lacks substance. At the time of the end-of-year visit, the Principal stated that “The after-school program is really lacking.” Two reasons were given for the lack of success of this remedial program: (1) tired personnel and (2) when not in a reading session, students did art work which might not have been age appropriate. Many at the school voiced concern about the rigor of the program. One teacher said that the after-school program needed more human resources, such as a reading specialist. Additionally, the effectiveness of the program had not been assessed by the school at the time of the visit. Given the reading ECLAS results, an assessment of this reading program could provide additional insights regarding student performance.

In the area of mathematics, although a UEE teacher trainer may help teachers, to a small degree, with Saxon Mathematics, there was no math intervention program at this school for students.

Since October 2005, the school has contracted the services of a certified special education teacher through Interactive Therapy Group (ITG). The special education teacher spends nearly one-hundred percent of her time at Bronx Excellence to provide services to twelve students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). School visitors learned that while time is scheduled for conducting “pull out” special education services, the special education provider does not follow the schedule on a consistent basis, often arriving late or not at all during scheduled times. Therefore, teachers’ instructional periods are often interrupted by students being pulled out, with little or no notice, casting students into a situation where they miss valuable instructional time and must make up work during either ELA or math class. No students who were English Language Learners were enrolled at the time of the visit.

At the time of the school’s first year visit, the school shared its plan to staff each classroom with a teacher and an educational associate. As of this year’s end-of-year visit, each Kindergarten and first grade classroom was staffed with a teacher and educational associate. However, the second grade classrooms shared one educational associate between them. Also, the staffing for 3rd grade in the upcoming 2006-07 school year did not include educational associates. Teachers expressed concern regarding the need for instructional support for students who have demonstrated less than proficient performance on the school’s value-added assessments.

Professional Development

The school devotes time during the two weeks that teachers report to school before the actual start of classes in the fall to professional development. During the second year of its contract, UEE’s professional development services provided teachers with an intensive three day, pre-service training on its research-based curriculum. During the year, UEE promises, by contract, to support teachers by conducting weekly classroom visits, grade level meetings, planning sessions, modeling lessons and providing evaluative feedback. The contract also stipulates the use of rigorous teacher training throughout the school year and the on-going assessment of all teachers and students. According to a document created by the school principal and given to inspectors at the time of the end of year visit and confirmed by staff, a professional developer meets with the teachers weekly to discuss student results, teaching strategies, pedagogy and curriculum. Then the professional developer meets with the principal to share teacher development, discuss student results, teacher strengths and weakness and how to best address them.

One UEE teacher-trainer was on-site once a week for one hour observing and meeting with teachers; she provides both oral and written feedback on ELA instruction in the classroom. During the 2005-06 school year, the UEE teacher-trainer also met with the long-term substitute science teacher to help plan for the remainder of the year. The writing developer visits the school once a month; however, several teachers did not feel that they received adequate instructional support from her.

In addition, the school independently hired a professional developer, who was also a UEE employee, to support the implementation of the UEE curriculum, primarily in reading. As a result, professional development at the school is focused on UEE initiatives, such as using assessment data to improve reading instruction. Professional development minimally addressed content knowledge, the development of students in writing or initiatives regarding the social studies curriculum. Teachers agreed that UEE had been very helpful in providing professional development support in reading, but support was limited solely to reading. One teacher stated, “The math program is scripted, but I would like more professional development in teaching reading, social studies and writing.” Another teacher stated that the UEE staff developer is supposed to be providing professional development, but then said, “I would argue she develops the UEE curriculum, but she’s not focused on developing us as teachers.”

The staff of six teachers and four educational associates appears to have had limited experience in classrooms before they began their teaching positions at the school. While the staff did have considerable help in the area of classroom management, provided mostly by the principal, several staff members acknowledged the importance of maintaining whole school consistency in this area and the need to sustain and develop more strategies for ensuring maximum classroom management among all new and veteran staff members.

While previous staff development workshops have focused on classroom management and literacy, the school might consider revising its staff development program to focus on the improvement of staff mastery of content knowledge, since all but two teachers were originally hired for their content knowledge of one area. Time management of instructional activities, including transitions, and pedagogy in all subject areas that will sponsor more rigorous instruction and ensure increased student focus during time on task would also be appropriate. In addition, it did not appear that teachers were receiving complete curriculum development in social studies or writing, as promised by UEE. Teachers reported that they turned to other teachers to help them structure curriculum in those areas.

The school’s first year teachers received “lots of development in classroom management,” but this year with the exception of the principal’s workshop on emotional intelligence, there was none, and both new and veteran teachers voiced the need for ongoing professional development regarding classroom management. It appears that when professional development did occur it focused on assessment and literacy instruction.

In addition to professional development for teachers, the professional development needs of the educational associates, whose role this year was expanded to include behavior management and

instructional support, warrant attention. To his credit, the principal voiced his desire to increase the frequency and intensity of professional development for educational associates.

Student Order and Discipline

The school changed from teachers as subject matter specialists rotating from class to class to teachers having self-contained classrooms during the 2005-06 school year. The new self-contained classrooms appeared to have resulted in greater teacher ownership and accountability, as well as a substantial improvement in student behavior. The improved classroom management, in turn, fostered a classroom culture of learning.

Behavior expectations seemed consistent for all students in all classes, although each classroom used a slightly different model for implementing the expectations. For example, one behavior management system noted by inspectors was a ticket system. Students earned, or lost, tickets based on their behavior. Other classroom teachers adopted a theme board on which students were represented by various objects, that were moved closer, or farther, from the goal. Two themes noted in classrooms were outer space and underwater. At the lowest level in each model, a student was required to fill out a behavior reflection sheet.

Inspectors noted that the educational associates, who monitored student academic work and student classroom behavior, were used more effectively this year than last. As the school grows, inspectors caution the school to provide further professional development for classroom teachers, and educational associates, in this area to maintain and increase the scholarly school culture.

School Leadership

During the 2005-06 school year, the priorities of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence have been, primarily, focused in the areas of development and the new Parkchester facility. Additionally, with the resignation of the original founder and executive director, staff expressed some confusion regarding school leadership and support for instruction. While the infrastructure was in place to provide adequate leadership, instructional support and communication, it did not appear the structure included “quality control” elements or concomitant long-range plans for improvement and refinement to accommodate change or to ensure that students received the skills needed for a rigorous elementary education as promised in the school’s mission statement and Accountability Plan.

The system, in the past, for reporting academic data to the board was through the executive director, after she conferred with the principal. It was not clear, if or to what extent, the principal and executive director looked at student performance data and compared that information to the school’s Accountability Plan, or how they communicated this information to the instructional staff. After the resignation of the executive director, the principal was instructed to report directly to the board. The principal expressed a certain amount of frustration by the lack of productive communication between him and the school board concerning issues that needed to be addressed, such as the assessment results.

The school's principal has assumed many of the executive director's responsibilities since her resignation. He stated that he spent approximately 40% of his time in classrooms with teachers and 60% on operational issues. Teachers reported that the school leader did not devote sufficient attention to supporting curriculum and instruction. The principal attended grade meetings four to five times a year. One teacher stated that the school's principal did not have time to help her define individual performance goals and coach her towards achieving those goals, but instead relied on occasional, whole-school professional development meetings. Another teacher said the principal "reinforces" the work of the UEE teacher trainer. Another teacher said there was no instructional leader and the teachers turned to each other for support. Systems for observing teachers and giving feedback were not systematically utilized. Teachers stated that the principal observed classes more frequently at the beginning of the academic year than at the time of the visit. Submission of lesson plans was required on a regular basis by the principal but one teacher said, "Because I never received any feedback on those lesson plans, I stopped doing so [submitting them]." While the principal is respected, none of the teachers were clear as to who is the school's instructional leader. In fact, due to his reduced availability to teachers and instructional staff, the UEE teacher-trainers have been placed in a "de facto" instructional leadership role.

The principal stated, and teachers concurred, that the principal was overwhelmed by his duties which included supervision of the non-educational and administrative staff. The principal stated that the school needs to fill two key fulltime positions: executive director and operations director. The board helped by employing a part time operations manager. Teachers voiced the need for a learning specialist, a position which had been vacant due to budget cuts. However, at mid-year the position was filled by using three adults already on staff, none of whom are trained to deliver a targeted "at-risk" support program. Also, second grade teachers mentioned the 2006-07 budget does not include funds for an educational associate for the struggling second grade. The Board hired a search firm with plans to retain a new executive director that would fill the position before school ended in June 2006.

In terms of instructional leadership, teachers stated that they had formal observations by the principal, who provided rubrics of expectations beforehand; however, no written review or performance goal setting followed the observations. Teachers believe that feedback from observations by the principal would be helpful. They indicated that observations rarely occurred; therefore, they turned to each other for instructional support and feedback.

Bronx Excellence, in its attempt to mitigate the effects of teachers working longer school days and school year, allowed teachers to determine whether they work until 3:30 or 5:00 on a two or three day schedule. One of the results of this implemented system was an inability to schedule the full instructional staff for meetings, professional development, information dissemination, and feedback. If the school continues the optional longer school day schedule for teachers, it may want to consider alternative strategies to ensure that all instructional staff are available to receive the necessary support to hone their pedagogical skills and to provide instruction that results in improved student learning.

Governance

The board of Bronx Excellence has experienced significant change between the first year of the school's opening and its second year of operation. The board has suffered significant member instability. Between the 2004-05 and 2005 -2006 school years, the board lost six members, while only gaining one. As recently as March 2006, the board consisted of five members. Shortly before the end-of-year visit, the board identified potential members to replace those who had left (including a new treasurer). At the time of the end-of-year visit, the board was also looking for someone with strong educational and development background to boost its expertise and experiential knowledge base in those areas. In addition, the board was in the process of revising its organizational structure.

Board members were considering a change in the size of the board. In the school's first year, the board undertook an initiative to grow to fifteen as per their original charter application plan, but the chairperson now states the board changed course and will continue with a smaller size of approximately seven members.

This year, acting as a committee of the whole, the board articulated, in writing, the goals, objectives and roles of its committees (Education, Finance, Facilities/Real Estate, Development, Discipline, and Executive), which were established by the end of the school's first year. The board was very clear in specifying the objectives of the Education Committee. Two key objectives were monitoring the quality of the school's academic performance, in conjunction with the school's executive director and principal, and working with the principal to resolve issues related to the academic activities of the school.

According to the principal, he and the board president have had "many" discussions regarding the school's academic performance. One result of those discussions was the establishment of a tutoring program in January 2006, with three full-time personnel at the school - the art teacher, the social worker and another teacher, who tutored children who were determined to be "at-risk." It was not clear to the visit team the extent of the Education Committee's involvement in monitoring the school's academic progress vis-à-vis its Accountability Plan and student test results, especially considering that the school still did not have comprehensive writing and social studies programs. According to the principal, the Education Committee had not met since the spring of 2005, and, at the time of the visit, was comprised of two members, one of whom had recently resigned.

This year the board completed performance evaluations for the executive director and the principal, which was an issue at the time of the school's first end-of-year report.

Appendix – Benchmarks Used During the Visit

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Renewal Question 1</p> <p>Is the School an Academic Success?</p>		
<p>Benchmark 1A</p> <p>Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p>1A.1</p>	<p>English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.2</p>	<p>Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.3</p>	<p>Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.4</p>	<p>Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p>1A.5</p>	<p>NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p>	<p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the regular administration of assessments, and the regular assignment of student work, e.g., projects, papers, etc., that are aligned to the state performance standards and to the school’s curricular scope and sequence; • the systematic collection of data from such

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>assessments and student work;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of protocols and procedures that ensure that the scoring of standardized and other assessments as well as student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school’s use of assessment data to determine accurately whether the school’s Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; • the school leadership’s use of assessment data to monitor and make improvements and changes to the school’s curriculum and instruction, e.g., changes to remediation, professional development, personnel, etc.; • teachers’ use of assessment data to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction, e.g., re-teaching a key skill where data indicates that the skill was not learned the first time; • a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; and • the regular communication of assessment outcomes to the entire school community, including communication to parents not only of their children’s individual performances but of the performance of the school as a whole.
<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has defined with precision in each grade and core academic subject the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve—at a minimum such skills and knowledge are aligned with and as rigorous as the relevant state performance standards; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible for teaching and have timely access to guidelines (scope and sequence, pacing charts, etc.) available for developing lesson plans;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers develop lesson plans that are in alignment with the guidelines and follow those plans; and • the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.
<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the priorities set by the school’s leadership are responsive to and consistent with achieving the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals and addressing deficiencies; these priorities are communicated to, and understood by, the school’s instructional staff; • the school’s leadership has taken concerted and consistent action in line with these priorities; • the school’s leadership has in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teachers’ effectiveness and quality; • the school’s leadership, based on classroom visits, and other data available to it, provides direct ongoing coaching and support in classrooms as well as structured opportunities for teachers to plan for the delivery of the instructional program; • the school’s leadership makes staffing decisions that are driven by its evaluation system and has in place a system for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and other instructional personnel that the school needs to meet its academic goals and measures; • the chief executive has deployed a leadership team whose members, in executing their roles and responsibilities, are able to support the effective delivery of the instructional program; and • the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations.
	<p>1D.2</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers demonstrate subject-matter competency in the subjects they teach; • lessons are focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards and reflect a clear understanding of students’ current skill and knowledge; • students are fully engaged in focused, purposeful activities; • instruction is delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • instructional time is maximized, transitions are efficient, there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers ask challenging questions to provoke student problem solving skills and assess student learning.
	<p>1D.3</p> <p>The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school’s academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployment of resources sufficient to support interventions and implement programs, which reflect a range of services and needs (in-class and remedial support, special education and ELL programs), depending on students’ academic and/or behavioral needs; • screening procedures for identifying students and providing them with the appropriate intervention, including appropriate Child Find procedures; • a common understanding among classroom teachers of the interventions and services available to students at risk of academic failure, as well as

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>procedures for accessing them;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordination of interventions and services with those of the mainstream program; and • monitoring the performance of students and using established school-wide and legal exit criteria for students, who based on their performance or other required assessments and evaluations, no longer need special interventions or services.
<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1E</p>	<p>The school’s culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued; • low-level misbehavior is not tolerated, e.g., students are not allowed to opt-out of learning or engage in quiet chatter during class time; • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
Benchmark 1F Professional Development	1F	<p>The school’s professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient resources to support a comprehensive program; • the content of the program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional strategy; • annual plans are derived from a school needs-assessment, based on identified instructional weaknesses, teacher interests, and analyses of student outcomes; • the school earmarks effective, ongoing support and training to novice teachers and teachers new to the school; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

Renewal Question 2
Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board will have received regular reports in writing from the school leadership in regards to key indicators of the school’s academic progress; the content of those reports, and a calendar for them, will have been agreed to by the board and the leadership team; • the board (or a committee thereof) will understand the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the
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Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>board to provide effective oversight;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board will have conducted formal evaluations of the school’s management and will have acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrate shortcomings in management’s performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board will have taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the board will not have made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; • the board will have established a set of priorities and a strategic plan that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and will have effectively worked to implement those goals and plans; and • the board will have in place a process for selecting new members as needed and structural continuity.
	<p>2C.2</p> <p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics)—which are consistent with those set forth in the charter—and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school’s 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

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy, including acting in a timely fashion on such complaints;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has abided by its by-laws, including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; and • the school board has in place a set of board policies which are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.
<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p>	<p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during the term of its charter, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements; • at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations; • the school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met; • the school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house, and where appropriate, independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?</p>		
<p>Benchmark 3A</p> <p>Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3A</p>	<p>The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • the budget process starts early and input from board members, school administration and staff is solicited and considered in developing the budget; • the school’s long-range fiscal plan is compared frequently to actual progress and adjusted to meet changing conditions; and • budget variances are analyzed routinely and material variance are discussed and addressed at the board level including any necessary budget revisions.
<p>Benchmark 3B</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3B</p>	<p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management’s direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies and analyzes risks and takes actions to mitigate such risks; • the school has controls in place to ensure that

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>management decisions are properly carried out;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy; • the school’s board members and employees adhere to a code of ethics; • the school makes purchasing decisions that consider price, quality and dependability and makes each purchasing selection with the intention of maintaining a top-quality school; • the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; • the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; • the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements; • a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; • the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; • the school ensures that employees, board members and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and • the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, State Education Department, or the Institute, if needed.
<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p>	<p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
		<p>The following reports will have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual financial statement audit reports, including federal Single Audit report if applicable. • annual budgets and cash flow statements. • un-audited quarterly reports of income and expense. • bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and State Education Department; and • grant expenditure reports.
<p>Benchmark 3D Financial Condition</p>	<p>3D</p>	<p>The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly; • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • the school provides education services at a level that meets the needs of all students demonstrated by student results that meet or exceed state standards; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

Visit Data

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second Year Visit Bronx Excellence Charter School on March 28, 2006. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit and/or contributed to this report:

MARINA BERNARD Education Consultant

Ms. Bernard began her career in education during the summer of 1992 as a Teach For America corps member. Upon completion of her teaching commitment, Ms. Bernard attended NYU's Gallatin School in fall of 1994 for a Masters degree in Educational Theater and Education. In January 1996, she joined the KIPP Academy in Bronx, NY as Founding Teacher. With the KIPP Academy's established success, in February of 2000, Ms. Bernard joined the Bronx Preparatory Charter School team as Founding Principal. Her goal was to help establish yet another school of excellence in the South Bronx. In June 2004, Marina shifted her focus from Founding Principal, to working as an Educational Consultant, working with families, schools, and associations focusing on education.

SUSAN SEYMOUR Senior Analyst

Susan Seymour is a Senior Analyst at the Charter Schools Institute, State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-Kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

JENNIFER SNEED, PH.D. Senior Vice President

Dr. Sneed is a veteran educator with 29 years of experience as a public school special education teacher and administrator [Illinois and New York], an Assistant Manager for Deaf Services at the postsecondary level [Indiana], and as a state level education policymaker [New York]. She received both her Bachelor of Science in Education of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Master of Science in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from Illinois State University in Bloomington, Illinois. Dr. Sneed earned both her Certificate of Advanced Study and her Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration with a focus on Education Policy, Politics and Law from the State University of New York – Albany.

KIM WECHTENHISER
Senior Analyst

Prior to her work with the Institute, Ms. Wechtenhiser served as the Coordinator of New Schools Development in the Charter School Office at the Massachusetts Department of Education, where she led the review of new charter school applications, provided technical assistance to newly chartered schools, participated in the ongoing review of their academic and organizational performance, and oversaw the charter amendment process. Ms. Wechtenhiser is the former Lead Teacher of Spanish at City on a Hill Charter Public School in Boston, where she also served as faculty representative to the school's Board of Trustees. She also taught Spanish at Westfield High School and English at the Universidad de Córdoba in Spain. Ms. Wechtenhiser holds a B.A. in Spanish and Secondary Education and a M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature, both from Simmons College. She earned an Ed.M. in School Leadership from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.