



Charter Schools Institute

The State University of New York

Bronx Charter School for Excellence

Third-Year (2006-07) Inspection Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The Third-Year Inspection is part of a comprehensive accountability system for those charter schools authorized by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. The inspection during the third year of a school's five-year charter cycle provides an independent assessment of the school's progress toward the academic and, on a more limited basis, organizational Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a component of the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks ("Renewal Benchmarks").

The third-year inspection complements the regular reviews conducted by the SUNY Charter Schools Institute by incorporating the Institute's documentation of the school's previous record of performance. This report provides an analysis of the data reviewed before and during the inspection visit and reflects any trends evident therein. In addition, this assessment provides insights which may contribute to the school's ongoing improvement efforts and support the school's case when it applies for initial or subsequent charter renewal. Finally, the Institute uses third-year inspection reports in discussions with school boards about the quality of their schools' educational programs and the schools' prospects for charter renewal.

This report is organized in the following sections:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Conduct of the Visit**
- III. School Description**
- IV. School Progress Report**
- V. Overall Trends Regarding the School**

Section I - the "Introduction" provides an overview of the third year visit process, as well as an overview of the organization of this report. Section II - the "Conduct of the Visit" includes a list of the members of the site visit team and their biographical sketches, along with a synopsis of the documents reviewed in preparation for the visit. Section III – the "School Description," as the title indicates, briefly describes the charter school in terms of its establishment and history.

Section IV- entitled the "School Progress Report," is divided into two parts: Part I, the "Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success," and Part II, the "Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability." Both parts of the School Progress Report reflect the site visit team's evidence and analysis of the school's effectiveness in meeting the standards set out in selected QEBs of the Renewal Benchmarks.

The “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success” is further divided into two components: the “School Performance Review,” which provides an analysis of student academic performance for the most recent two years as an indication of the school’s academic success (Renewal Benchmark 1A), and the “School Educational Program Review,” which reflects the visit team’s analysis of the qualitative aspects of the school’s educational program based upon the guiding questions provided by the Institute and aligned with Renewal Benchmarks 1B - 1F.

“Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability,” focuses on three components: clarity of the school’s mission and vision to its stakeholders; parent and student satisfaction; and the establishment of systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school’s instructional program. Renewal Benchmarks 2B, 2D1, and 2C1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

In the final section of the Third-Year Visit report, Section V - “Overall Trends Regarding the School,” the visit team offers its insights about any patterns that have emerged across the full spectrum of the school. Here the team offers its judgments about the school’s effectiveness at meeting the broad goals defined in the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (Education Law §2850(2) (a-f)):

- improving student learning and achievement;
- increasing learning opportunities for all students (particularly students at risk of academic failure);
- encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- creating new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- expanding parental choice in public schools; and
- moving from a rule-based to performance-based accountability system by holding schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

The judgments of the team are organized into two categories: academic program and organizational viability. The framework for the progress report discussion is shown in Appendix A, and the Renewal Benchmarks, in their entirety, are included in Appendix B.

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence was conducted on May 1-2, 2007 by an independent team of experienced educators from the Center for Evidence-Based Education, Princeton, New Jersey. The team included:

- **Mary Ayala** – Senior Associate. Formerly, a principal in the Rochester (New York) City School District, Mary has also served as an English department chairperson and the vice-

principal of a school recognized by the New York State Department of Education as a “Distinguished Progress School.”

- **Deidré Farmbry** – Senior Associate. Formerly, the interim superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, Deidré has also served as a teacher, department head, principal, regional superintendent and chief academic officer.
- **David Green** – President. Formerly, one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools in England and Wales, David has worked with the New York and Illinois State Departments of Education on school improvement and accountability measures and has served as an advisor to a wide range of organizations and foundations in the U.S.
- **Nancy Richmond** – Senior Associate. Formerly, a principal of a school that received the National Blue Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education and the Exemplary Reading Program Award from the International Reading Association, Nancy has mentored charter school principals in New Jersey.

The team used Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (QEBs), a subset of the Renewal Benchmarks, as the guides for its evaluation. In addition, the team relied on a set of framework questions to structure the “School Progress Report” section of this document. Prior to the two-day visit, the team reviewed the school’s documents, including its annual *Accountability Plan Progress Report* and reports from previous site visits by the Charter Schools Institute or other entities, such as the New York State Education Department. During the visit, the team observed classes, reviewed student work, interviewed school administrators, school board members, staff, parents and students, and reviewed curriculum and other documents to understand the efforts the school is making to achieve its academic and organizational goals.

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of The State University of New York approved the charter for Bronx Charter School for Excellence (“Bronx Excellence”) on February 25, 2003. The Board of Regents subsequently issued the school’s certificate of incorporation on April 29, 2003. After taking a planning year, the school opened in August of 2004 at 1508 Webster Avenue in the Bronx. The school initially served 100 students in Kindergarten and first grades, adding grade two for the 2005-06 school year, and grade 3 in the fall of 2006 for a total enrollment of 200 students during the 2006-07 school year. The school plans to add grade four in 2007-08 with an anticipated enrollment of 250 students. The founders ultimately envision a Kindergarten through eighth grade school.

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.

The Bronx Charter School for Excellence strives to hire teachers who are experts in the subjects they teach. In this way the faculty will have a depth of content knowledge that allows them to provide students with a rigorous and focused learning experience. Time for thorough and effective professional development is built into the school day and the calendar year to afford teachers time to review and analyze the academic performance of every student. The results of their analysis are used on a daily basis to strengthen student achievement. In addition, Bronx Charter School for Excellence uses a merit pay structure where staff salaries and incentives are performance-based and determined by both quantitative and qualitative measures.

The academic program and school culture is modeled after high performing charter schools such as KIPP Academy, a middle school. The lead applicant studied these models during the planning phase; recognizing, however, the need to adapt them in certain respects to the primary grades.

The charter's Executive Summary states that Bronx Excellence will achieve its mission through the following key design elements of the school:

- small classrooms (only 50 students per grade level);
- extended day and year;
- high academic standards;
- subject-based teaching;
- professional opportunities for teachers;
- school uniforms;
- clearly articulated behavior standards for students;
- Executive Director/Principal administrative structure; and performance-based accountability.

The Bronx Excellence program for young students provides a “back to basics” educational program, including a phonics-based reading curriculum in the early grades followed by a strong English language arts focus through fourth grade. The application speaks of a curriculum that is rich in children's literature and creates a solid foundation upon which students' phonic and comprehension skills can grow. The curriculum also includes mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, dance, music and the visual arts.

School Year

200 instructional days

School Day¹

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

¹ 7:45 a.m. to 8:15 a.m. is used as a time for student welcoming and breakfast. 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. is used for homeroom, enrichment, and remediation if necessary.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment²	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2003-04	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2004-05	100	100	100	K-1	K-1	K-1	YES
2005-06	150	150	145	K-2	K-2	K-2	YES
2006-07	200	200	200	K-3	K-3	K-3	YES
2007-08	250			K-4			

Race/Ethnicity	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	%	3	2.1%
Black (Not Hispanic)	68	68.0%	89	61.8%
Hispanic	32	32.0%	52	36.1%
White	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Source: NYSED 2004-05 Report Card (2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

Free/Reduced Lunch	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	60	60.0%	75	52.1%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	0	0.0%	14	9.7%

Source: NYSED 2004-05 Report Card (2004-05), NYSED Database (2005-06)

² Actual enrollment per the Institute’s Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2004-05 School Report Card, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch and student demographic figures are calculated, cited a 2004-05 enrollment of 100 students. The NYSED 2005-06 database cited an enrollment of 144 students.

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter 1st Year	2003-04	Planning Year	NO		
Original Charter 2 nd Year	2004-05	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter; End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
Original Charter 3 rd Year	2005-06	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	
Original Charter 4 th Year	2006-07	3 rd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	

IV. SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

Part 1: Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Academic Success

A. - “School Performance Review”

<p>PERFORMANCE SUMMARY</p>	<p>The school served students in grades K-2 in 2005-06, thus no results are available for state tests. However, based on ECLAS-2 and ITBS literacy results, kindergarten and 1st grade students appear to be on track while 2nd grade students were performing below grade level. The ITBS results also indicated performance in mathematics was below grade level and declined in both 1st and 2nd grade.</p>
<p>English language arts</p>	<p>On the ECLAS-2, kindergarten students exceeded their 75 percent target on all Level 1 and 2 strands tested in 2005-06. Likewise, the 1st grade exceeded their 74 percent target on all Level 4 strands. However, less than 40 percent of 2nd grade students were proficient on their Level 6 strands. On the value added measure, the 1st grade met its target in reading, word analysis and language. The 2nd grade only met its target in reading.</p>
<p>Mathematics</p>	<p>On the ITBS test, neither 1st nor 2nd grade made their target on the value added measure. Moreover, both grades finished the year below grade level.</p>
<p>Science</p>	<p>Not applicable this year.</p>
<p>Social Studies</p>	<p>Not applicable this year.</p>
<p>NCLB</p>	<p>The school is deemed to be in Good Standing under the state’s NCLB Accountability system.</p>
<p>Additional Goals (optional)</p>	<p>The school met its parent satisfaction goal and came close to meeting its attendance rate goal. The school also reported meeting its goals for legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.</p>

B. “School Educational Program Review”

- **To what extent does the school have a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning?**

The Bronx Charter School for Excellence employs multiple tools to gather assessment and evaluation data, as presented in the following table:

Assessment Tool	Timeline	Purpose	Results available to...
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)	Fall and Spring (Gr.1-3) Spring (K)	Compare student performance to a national norm	Teachers Administrators Parents
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)	3 times during school year	Assess student skill mastery in language arts literacy	Teachers Administrators
Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS-2)	Mid-year and end of year	Assess student skill proficiency in literacy	Teachers Administrators
New York State Assessments	Spring (Gr. 3)	Compare student proficiency to state performance standards	Teachers Administrators Parents

Teachers reported limited use of assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional assessment and student learning. They stated that they had not received professional development designed to help them derive meaning from the data that would enable them to adjust practice, improve instruction, and enhance student learning. Data generated from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) has the potential to be useful in looking at the overall performance of a class and in comparing growth from fall to spring, according to some teachers; however, it contains little detail with which to help teachers and administrators individualize instruction and guide student learning. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is employed to identify and document mastery of sequenced literacy skills. Even with the assistance of the Urban Education Exchange (UEE) in administering the DIBELS three times each year, teachers expressed mixed feelings about the value of this data against the amount of time consumed gathering it for each student. The Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System-2 (ECLAS-2), a literacy development checklist, assesses students in four literacy strands: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading and oral expression, and listening and writing. Though administration of this tool does take away instructional time, teachers generally feel that the information derived is valuable. In particular, the ongoing and sequential nature of the tool and the related recordkeeping (it follows students from K – 3rd grade) is helpful to teachers in seeing more longitudinal patterns of proficiency. The New York State Assessment Program tests are administered to 3rd grade students in the spring. Because the 2006-07 school year was the first year that the Bronx Charter School for Excellence had a 3rd grade class, the school has recently completed the first round of state testing at the time of the inspection visit. Teacher and administrator responses could not be collected at the time of the visit.

There was little evidence that assessment data is routinely used to make decisions about what is taught, either at the classroom or school level. Although a substantial amount of data is being collected, there has been limited use of this information to guide instruction. At the time of the Third Year Inspection Visit, the principal had been at the school for only two months yet she had a clear plan to organize and systemize data through the implementation of an assessment binder which will be maintained by each teacher throughout the year. Data available to teachers, including ITBS, DIBELS, ECLAS-2, writing conference notes, running records, benchmark assessments such as mathematics unit tests, attendance records, and New York City Department of Education assessments, will be organized in this binder so that it is readily available for teacher reference.

The school may want to contemplate refining its administration of assessments to result in an assessment system that includes formative and summative assessments that are both aligned with the curriculum and designed to provide feedback for instructional planning. In addition, it appears that teachers might greatly benefit from receiving professional development that specifically focuses on how to use the data available to them to inform instruction. ECLAS-2 and DIBELS both assess literacy proficiency and, since both are time-consuming to administer and provide duplicate information on students' levels of proficiency in literacy, the school might want to consider eliminating one of them.

- **To what extent does the school have a clearly defined and aligned curriculum?**

The school did not have a clearly defined curriculum or one that was aligned with New York State Standards. The English language arts curriculum was fragmented and in need of immediate revision. In literacy, there was no evidence of integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening, or that attention was being given to continuity in the students' learning as they moved from grade to grade. The mathematics curriculum made insufficient demands upon the students and was unlikely to assist them in achieving mastery of mathematics concepts. The Saxon Math program, as adopted, was inadequate in meeting the demands of the state standards in mathematics. Both the science curriculum and the social studies curriculum were in need of urgent revision as neither was either clearly articulated or aligned with the state standards. Addressing these issues is likely to have profound fiscal implications for the school. There was no evidence of well-focused and sustained professional development having been made consistently available either to the teachers or the educational associates, or of either group being assisted to differentiate the curriculum in critical ways. The school's leadership team was acutely aware of this issue, and under the leadership of the recently appointed principal, action was being taken to remedy the situation prior to the beginning of the 2007-08 school year. In fact, the new principal's familiarity with various instructional resources and approaches enabled her to make judgments about both materials and methods, contributing to a strategy for developing a more coordinated and sustainable approach to literacy and overhauling the mathematics curriculum. She drew from her prior experiences to fill the void in the curriculum for social studies.

- **Does the school use its defined and aligned curriculum to prepare students to meet state performance standards?**

Given the absence of a well-defined curriculum and one aligned to the New York State standards, the school was unable to adequately prepare the students to meet the state's various performance standards. Both teachers and educational associates reported that they had attempted to supplement the curricular offerings, especially in their teaching of literacy and mathematics; yet, despite their good intentions, there was little to suggest that the students were regularly exposed to a challenging curriculum. In neither science nor social studies were students challenged to anything approaching

the extent necessary for them to meet the state's performance standards. However, the curriculum in both music and dance was challenging, and exposed students to experiences that were aligned with good practice. The overall situation was one of which the leadership team was aware, and which the recently appointed principal was working urgently to address. In doing so, it was critical that attention be given to ensuring that clear learning expectations were in place, ones that are comprehensible to the students, and that the students are not only introduced to a range of strategies through which those expectations might be met, but also that they are given a sense of what success looks like. Appropriately paced instructional strategies will need to be developed that include frequent and focused feedback being given to all students.

- **What evidence indicates that the school is guided by strong instructional leadership?**

With the hiring of a new principal during the spring of 2007, the Bronx Charter School for Excellence is now in a position to be guided by stronger instructional leadership. The new principal brings both a vision and a wide range of expertise to serve as the impetus for instructional improvements. Although, at the time of the inspection visit, she had only recently assumed her position, she had already assessed areas of need, was able to articulate them clearly and convincingly, and had begun developing a strategy for revising past practices that were not yielding desired outcomes. For instance, she had scheduled Saturday professional development sessions on instructional topics having whole-school impact and had ascertained the need for a change in the provider of professional development. She had reviewed the assessments that teachers had been using and had begun the process of revising them for next year with a five-year goal of having more authentic forms of assessment in place. In addition, the new principal had determined which teachers were not contributing to students' academic growth and was actively recruiting teachers with skills more in alignment with the instructional needs of the student population. Based on her insightful analyses of school issues and the development, and implementation, of plans for certain changes, it was clear that the new principal has the capacity to provide strong instructional leadership. However, she will need to set priorities and be supported in such a way that she does not become overburdened by tasks that could divert her attention from instruction. Additionally, she will need to cultivate teacher leadership in a climate that up to this point, has not promoted extensive professional collaboration. In so doing, she will benefit from developing regular collaborative conversations, focused on teaching and learning, between her and the teachers, as well as among the teachers. During the inspection visit, teachers expressed some concern that she did not visit classrooms on a regular basis in order to have first-hand observations of their work. These observations would be important sources of information for the principal to use in instituting productive, collaborative conversations. With a small staff, the principal might consider conducting both short and longer visits to classrooms that result in providing instructional feedback that helps teachers genuinely improve their practice.

- **Is high quality instruction evident throughout the school?**

Although the school proposes to "provide the academic foundation necessary for our students to compete against their more advantaged peers," there is little evidence that high quality instruction was sufficiently in place to make this vision a reality. A number of factors have contributed to undermining the development of high quality instruction, including leadership upheaval, changes in teaching assignments, changes in curriculum, and the absence of systemic professional development. The new principal had already begun to address issues of curriculum design and professional development in recognition that they are key to improving the quality of instruction across the school. In some instances, she had provided professional development herself. Staff expressed

confidence in what the principal knows about instruction and her capacity to bring about needed changes.

In its original charter, the school proposed to have subject-based teaching so that teachers would be experts in the subjects they teach. This approach was soon abandoned and classroom teachers and teacher assistants became responsible for delivering instruction in English language arts, mathematics, and social studies. At the time of the inspection visit, science was provided by a teacher specialist. A number of teachers were uncertified and relatively new to the profession. In those lessons observed, the majority of teachers demonstrated subject-matter competency. However, in teacher interviews, many staff expressed frustration with the curriculum and with professional development offerings. The curriculum for English language arts was described as fragmented and was supplemented with a variety of workbooks and worksheets. Teachers explained that they frequently conferred with each other in order to decide what key elements should constitute literacy instruction. They also pointed out that a sequential writing curriculum was still being developed as were curriculum maps for social studies and science. The schedule did not provide teachers with adequate common planning time to discuss what was being taught and how best to teach it. Nor were there adequate efforts to have teachers routinely observe each other and share their insights.

Learning aims were posted and teachers frequently referenced these aims throughout the lessons in the majority of classrooms observed. However, it was less clear that the aims and objectives were aligned to state performance standards.

In those classrooms observed, a number of practices detracted from a quality learning experience for students. There was little evidence of differentiation with the use of individual conferencing or small group instruction. Most lessons consisted of whole-group instruction followed by students filling in worksheets. Many of the worksheets appeared to have been teacher-designed. In a number of instances, students were copying information into their journals with little opportunity for discussion. In addition, the use of time was problematic. In some classrooms, students who had completed worksheets sat idly, waiting for others to finish. In other classrooms, worksheets lacked sufficient content to justify the amount of time allocated for their completion. However, it was noted in a number of classrooms that transition routines from one activity to another were well-established and contributed to instructional continuity. For example, one teacher used a set of questions to review students' understanding of certain social studies terms (city, borough, state). Students conferred within their work group and, on agreeing upon and responding with a correct answer, moved enthusiastically to join their classmates on the reading rug. Virtually no time was lost in moving from one activity to another.

- **Does the school have 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)?**

The school has administrative staff and a defined methodology to work with students receiving special education services. At the time of the inspection visit, 17 students had individualized education programs (IEPs) and received instruction in general education classrooms. A special education coordinator had been in place since the 2005-06 school year and divided her time between administrative duties and instructional support for classified students. In-class support was provided by either the lead teacher or the teaching assistant. Teachers made an effort to meet with the special education coordinator and share what they were teaching so that her pull-out sessions align with what was being taught in classrooms. The special education coordinator was responsible for implementing

and monitoring the specific teacher responsibilities relative to students' IEPs. To that end, she is charged with making sure that classroom teachers are aware of students' academic and social performance levels, goals and objectives relative to their disability, testing accommodations, and promotional criteria. According to the school's IEP Implementation Policy, she meets with teachers periodically to provide updates and suggestions for "teaching/classroom management method adjustments." It is difficult to determine if this approach is "demonstrably effective" in that the school does not appear to look at the performance of classified students as a distinct cohort. Data that was presented to the inspection team reported the achievement of individual students and grade level classes.

Teachers expressed considerable frustration with the challenge of teaching students with a wide range of skill levels with no well-defined program of academic intervention for non-classified students. They noted that many classroom materials are on grade level and consequently do not meet the needs of all students. In a move to provide some level of intervention, a few teachers were trained in the Wilson Foundations program in order to address gaps in the phonemic/phonological awareness of their emerging readers.

At weekly Student Study Team meetings, discussions were held about non-classified students who needed additional academic support. However, due to staff and scheduling limitations, there was no well-defined, tiered approach to providing academic intervention even when warranted. At best, some teachers used some of their planning periods to help struggling students.

For the future, the school may want to consider how best to allocate time and staff to provide targeted instruction for struggling students, whether as part of the school's extended day or as part of the end of a regular school day. Many teachers reported that time at the end of the school day was not always purposeful and productive. In addition, to maximize the effectiveness of any academic intervention strategies or program, it would be critical for the school to provide professional development to assist instructional staff in developing their own repertoire of interventions that can be used in general classroom settings.

- **To what extent does the school's culture allow and promote a learning environment?**

The small, safe and nurturing environment of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence is conducive to a positive learning experience. The new building, acknowledged by staff to be far superior to the former school site, is modern, bright, clean and attractive. Student work was posted in classrooms and hallways, suggesting that the learning environment supports student engagement. In classroom visits, the team noticed that students were on task, responsive and happy in their work. Transition times were orderly and quiet, enabling classes in session to continue their focus without distraction. A tone of politeness and respect prevailed, with students addressing each other and the adults with whom they came in contact in a cordial manner. The size of the school is conducive to close teacher/student connections. Several teachers commented on the extent to which they know not only their current students, but also students they may have taught previously, stating that they are able to hold students accountable for their progress and their behavior based on past relationships with them. Additionally, the school's culture, as it promotes close relationships, facilitates the involvement of parents. One teacher described how her close connections with her students' parents have enabled her to develop parent/child activities to reinforce learning over the weekends and holidays, and how parents help out by volunteering to serve as chaperones for trips. Staff stated that they enjoy working in a neighborhood that is safe, appreciating the fact that they are able to arrange local field trips to community resources such as a public library that is around the corner from the school.

In introducing the proposed 2007-08 organizational structure, with the addition of two, part-time Deans (Dean of Academics and Dean of Students), the executive director and principal will need to ensure that the more cumbersome structure projected does not create an overly bureaucratic culture at the expense of a more collaborative one. While change is needed, that change should not necessarily add bureaucratic layers at the expense of clarifying and possibly redefining existing roles.

- **Does the school's professional development program assist teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge?**

Currently, the school's professional development is not adequate in content or process, as assessed by the new principal and reinforced in statements made by teachers. The school has had a history of primarily using one professional development provider who, according to teachers, is more versed in secondary school practices than elementary ones. The principal reduced the services of the provider for the remainder of the 2006-07 school year, with the goal of eliminating the services in the 2007-08 school year.

Structurally, there was no time during the day for professional development, and a two-tiered dismissal structure presented difficulty in scheduling professional development after school. At the time of the inspection visit, the new principal was providing some non-mandatory professional development opportunities on Saturdays while she investigated how time could be reallocated in the 2007-08 school year to allow for more professional development during normal work hours. Once she addresses the teacher isolation, which was both evident (the schedule reflected few opportunities for teachers to meet) and expressed (in teacher interviews), and fosters a more collaborative culture, she will be able to implement professional development anchored in collegial practices that define professional learning communities, such as peer observations, the sharing of successful practice, reflection, and inquiry. The principal was aware that professional development had been driven by the provider's repertoire of offerings rather than the data-driven needs of the school's instructional staff. She is using data to determine the scope of professional development and is interested in having a professional growth plan for each teacher as well as a plan for the school as a whole.

Part 2. Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Organizational Viability

A. Are the school's mission and vision clear to all stakeholders?

- **To what extent is the school faithful to its mission?**

Although there is evidence that the school's mission and vision are understood by all stakeholders, implementation, especially with regard to high standards, remains a challenge. As part of its Accountability Plan, the school will need to successfully meet its outcome measures in order to ensure a finding that "the school is educationally sound and able to continue to improve student learning and achievement." English language arts assessment data from 2005-2006 indicates that students in grades K-1 are exceeding proficiency levels, while second grade students are not. As stated in the 2005-06 Report on Progress Made Towards Accountability Goals, "...these proficiency levels are not where they must be for our students to be successful learners (p. 3)." In mathematics, none of the classes achieved the school's goal. With these results in mind, school staff are looking at the alignment of their curriculum with state standards and seeking to identify gaps in what is being taught. However, a more critical first step is to determine whether or not the curriculum in English language arts and mathematics is of sufficient quality to ensure student success. It would appear that this concern is being addressed in that the school modified its contract with UEE so that it could "pick and choose" curriculum components. The school has also noted the absence of a writing curriculum and is considering ways to remedy the situation. Ultimately, the need exists to develop a coherent curriculum in English language arts that provides students with a solid foundation of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. In mathematics, students need a curriculum that will develop their computation skills as well as their understanding of key mathematics concepts.

In order to accelerate student achievement, the school instituted a Saturday Academy to provide additional support for struggling students. The school also had an extended day until 5:00 pm. There were concerns that the Activity Hour from 4:00 – 5:00 pm was not utilized well to support improved student achievement. Students attended a given activity based on the bus they rode rather than as a result of a need for targeted instruction or scaffolding.

The school has been faithful to the portion of its mission statement that calls for cultivating the artistic development of students. Quality art, music and dance experiences were provided on a regular basis and students enjoyed these opportunities for creative self-expression.

- **Has the school implemented the key design elements included in its charter?**

In its original design, the Bronx Charter School for Excellence proposed to accomplish its mission based on the following key components: high standards, a "Back to Basics" approach with the curriculum, a high performance-base culture, an extended day and year, and performance-based accountability. The inspection team's observations and discussions indicated that the school had not implemented some of the key design elements of its charter. During the visit, the Executive Director confirmed that a comprehensive proposal of charter changes was being developed for submission. The most important change was the review of the curricula in English language arts and mathematics and the discussion of how well these curricula align with state standards. The school stopped using Open Court Reading and McGraw Hill Explorations/Applications as part of its original "Back To Basics" approach, as test results showed minimal impact. However, they have been replaced with a collection of programs including Scholastic Guided Reading, Steck Vaughn, Wordly Wise, and Kaplan.

The school had not complied with its original charter design in the administration of certain assessments. The charter indicates that the school should be administering the TerraNova while it used DIBELS, ECLAS, and ITBS. A more important consideration is whether or not the school's use of these multiple assessments contributes in any way to instructional planning.

Although the school had implemented a longer school day as part of its design, the impact was more quantitative than qualitative. As mentioned previously, the hour between 4:00 – 5:00 pm was not necessarily aligned with instructional needs. In addition, there was no time built into the schedule to provide academic intervention for those students who were already falling behind.

The school had successfully implemented school uniforms and clearly articulated behavior standards for students as cornerstones of its culture. In the inspection team's contact with them in classes and hallways, students were respectful, courteous, and well-behaved.

B. Are students and parents satisfied with the work of the school?

• To what extent are parents/guardians and students satisfied with the school?

This benchmark addresses evidence of strong positive feelings among the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school. Evidence of parent satisfaction and positive feelings about the school includes large numbers of parents seeking entrance to the school, parents with students enrolled keeping their children enrolled year-to-year, and students having strong positive attitudes (including an attendance rate exceeding that of comparable public schools).

During the site visit, the external visit team accessed information relevant to parent and student satisfaction from four sources: a focus group discussion with parents; a focus group discussion with students; conversations with teachers around the question, "what is your perception of the level of parent satisfaction at Bronx Charter School for Excellence," and an examination of attendance and enrollment data.

The parents participating in the focus group discussion varied in the length of time they had been associated with the school. One parent had her children at the school, "from the beginning," and has one child in 3rd grade and one in kindergarten. At the other end of the range was a parent whose son came to the school in September 2006 as a 3rd grader. Parents reported a high level of satisfaction with Bronx Excellence. They were especially pleased with the size of the school, smaller than the traditional public schools their children would be attending, and with the fact that there are two "teachers" in each classroom (one teacher and one paraprofessional). Parents enjoyed the beautiful facility where the school is now housed and felt that the environment was clean and safe. They reported that they would recommend the school to a friend or family member; one parent shared that she decided to enroll her daughter at the school because she had seen some work that her cousin's son had brought home from the school and was impressed: "That was what I wanted for my daughter." When asked what their children like most about the school, parents listed the reading, dancing, and writing programs. They shared that because the school is small their children know the other children and feel comfortable there. When asked if they felt that their children were being challenged with the school's curriculum, one parent responded, "No, my son is not being challenged." The parents of two kindergarten students indicated that the level of challenge was "just right" for their children.

Parents were invited to make a “wish list” for the Bronx Charter School for Excellence, and they noted a need for consistency of the quality of the teachers. Further prompting of this thought revealed that one parent’s son had a teacher who was clearly not as effective as the other teacher on the same grade level: “If he had the other teacher, he would be having a much better year.” The other parents agreed that there is not always equity in the quality among the teachers: “We always have to worry about what teacher our children will get.” Parents also pointed to the need for stability of the teaching staff. They expressed concern about the high turnover rate of teachers and wished that teachers would stay longer so that more stable relationships might be developed. Male mentoring is another area parents would like to see developed. The mother of a boy shared that she wishes there were extracurricular activities that would provide male mentoring opportunities for boys at the school, similar to Girl Scouts for the girls.

The group of students participating in the focus group conversation represented all grade levels, K – 3, and eagerly engaged in a lively discussion around their satisfaction with the school. Students across all grades reported that they like the school and are happy to be part of the Bronx Charter School for Excellence student body. The question, “What do you like most about your school?” yielded such responses as, “learning new things,” “the students here are good,” “teachers teach us a lot,” and “the teachers help us and explain things.” Students also expressed satisfaction with the music, dance, and science programs and shared that they have learned about nutrition, hygiene, diabetes, the pancreas, and asthma. They reported that their teachers are “good” and help them learn. When invited to make a “wish list” for the school, students shared the following ideas to improve the school: a bigger science lab, more activities between 4:00 and 5:00, swings on the playground, a bigger playground, clean bathrooms, more subjects like karate, clubs, and Japanese, field trips, a library, and a swimming pool with a diving board.

Teachers were asked to consider the following question: “What is your perception of the level of parent satisfaction with the Bronx Charter School for Excellence?” Although this question was asked individually of teachers and not as part of a focus group discussion, responses were similar and in two parts: “Parents seem very satisfied with the school” and “This actually surprises us. Parents seem to think the school is better than teachers think it is at this point.”

In addition, parents, teachers, and administrators were asked about sustained enrollment: “Has Bronx Excellence lost many students since it opened?” All respondents answered that the only significant loss in enrollment occurred when the school moved to the new location. It was reported that the move created a situation in which a number of parents felt that the new location would necessitate a longer trip to school than they would be comfortable with. They also reported that they know there is a waiting list of families who want to enroll students at the school, and available spots are filled from the waiting list. In terms of sustained enrollment during the 2006-07 school year, records shared with the inspection team showed that on September 5, 2006, 191 students were enrolled at the school. On April 26, 2007, 187 students were enrolled, a decrease of 4 students. Student attendance provides an additional indicator of student satisfaction with the school. Attendance records for the period from September 5, 2006 to April 26, 2007 indicate that the daily average attendance was 93.3 percent.

Conversations with parents, students, and teachers provide evidence of a generally high level of parent and student satisfaction. Enrollment and attendance affirm this general sense of satisfaction.

C. Are systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of the academic program and to modify it as needed?

• Has the school board worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals?

Systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the academic program and modifying it as needed were in an early phase of development, with no functioning self-evaluation program in place. Reportedly, this was primarily due to the various transitions that have occurred not only in school leadership, but also in school board composition. A review of minutes from several board meetings indicated that a quorum had not always been present for meetings and that there were several resignations from the board in the 2006-07 school year. Two educators had recently been added to the board, signaling that the focus at future board meetings might shift to issues more directly tied to teaching and learning. While the minutes reflected some reporting of academic affairs, documenting key concerns such as a lack of appropriate and meaningful professional development, the need for a more structured after school program and “disappointing” DIBELS results at grades 1 and 2, the emphasis had been on matters of business and finance. As the new principal develops strategies for accelerating progress at the school, the board will need to deepen its understanding of the academic challenges to support the principal’s requests for the necessary resources to bring about improvements. The school’s shift from a survival mode (struggling to carry out a sound educational program) to a progressive, developmental mode (considering, planning and implementing educational strategies and structures to both provide an infrastructure and increase student learning) will necessitate a framework to foster greater board understanding of the magnitude of work to be done in the area of teaching and learning. While the board’s focus previously may have been on locating a building, the successful move to a new site and the appointment of a new principal provide a ripe opportunity for the development of a strategic plan to support academic achievement. As one board member stated, “We are pointed in the right direction, and we are in good hands.”

V. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

The academic program at the Bronx Charter School for Excellence, at the time of the school's third year inspection visit, was weak. In the key curricular areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, there were no clearly articulated curricula, or ones that were aligned to state standards. It is urgent that this situation be remedied without further delay. The recently appointed principal is clearly aware of the situation, and has begun to address it as a matter of urgency. She will require unambiguous and substantial support from both her senior colleagues and the board of trustees if she is to succeed in this task. As a coherent curriculum begins to emerge, attention will need to be given to how it will best be taught, and to the continuing professional development necessary to support the teachers and educational associates in their work. It will be critical for the professional development to support the design and implementation of an assessment system that provides teachers and educational associates with timely information about the progress and achievement of the students. Indeed, the system will ideally engage both groups, not only in the analysis of summative assessments, but also in the use of formative assessments, and most especially support the development of classroom assessment throughout the school. As appropriate, this assessment data should be shared with parents in order to support the key contributions they are looking to make to their children's learning.

The excellent work in music and dance should continue to be supported and developed, as it clearly provides the students with important educational experiences. The range of experiences of this order will be increased yet further when the students have on-site access to a school library and/or classroom libraries that are adequately resourced with books and other study materials.

Organizational Viability

The Bronx Charter School for Excellence is a viable organization. The recently expanded Board of Trustees has the expertise and potential to provide the professional staff with the support they require in addressing their current challenges. The school's recent organizational challenges have, however, clearly impacted upon its capacity to serve the students well, but this is not an irreversible situation, nor is it one that should exist in the 2007-08 school year. In addressing and overcoming these challenges, the board of trustees will benefit from working closely and collaboratively with parents, ensuring that the parent body overall is able to play a full role in the work and development of the school. Focusing on their strategic, fiscal, and appraisal roles in governance will enable the board of trustees to provide a stable context in which the professional staff, who now have the benefit of a knowledgeable and focused principal, to remedy the academic weaknesses of the past, and build an educational community able to meet the learning needs of the students. In discharging these roles, and especially in developing its strategic plan, the board may wish to strengthen its overall understanding of the academic work of the school, and of the particular supports necessary to enable the staff to perform at the maximum of their capacity, including adequate fiscal support for much needed curricular materials. In addition, early attention should be given to supporting the professional learning of the staff as they work to implement a curriculum aligned to state standards, and to the provision of executive coaching for both the executive director and the principal. Such coaching should enable both individuals to add yet further value to their work on behalf of the school. It would be opportune if an early focus in their coaching is the organizational structure of the

school, as the proposed structure for the 2007-08 school year might well be overly cumbersome for a school of this size.

Finally, and in close collaboration with the staff, the board of trustees would find it beneficial to initiate an annual self-evaluation process to answer three key questions: How good is our school? How do we know? What should we do next? Such an initiative would contribute to ensuring that the challenges of the past year are not repeated, and that whatever other challenges do arise can be dealt with effectively and in a timely manner.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

Category	Report Section (Relevant Benchmark(s))	Evidence Sources
Academic Program	School Performance Review (Renewal Benchmark 1A)	Developed by Institute
	School Educational Program Review (Renewal Benchmarks 1B – 1F)	Classroom observations; Interviews; Review of documents and student work
Organizational Viability	School’s Mission and Vision (Renewal Benchmark 2B)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations
	Student and Parent Satisfaction (Renewal Benchmark 2D1)	Interviews; Review of school documents, including the Accountability Plan Progress Report
	Board of Trustees’ Systems (Renewal Benchmark 2C1)	Review of documents; Interviews; Classroom observations

APPENDIX B

**Charter Renewal
Benchmarks**

Version 3.2

June 2006

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An Introduction to the Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmarks serve primarily two functions at renewal:

- They provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute to gather evidence to determine whether a school has made an adequate case for renewal. In turn, this evidence permits the Institute to decide if it can make the ultimate legal and other findings it is required to make in order to reach a positive recommendation for renewal. Thus, for instance, the various benchmarks that the Institute uses to determine whether the school has had in place fiscally responsible practices during the last charter period allow the Institute to determine with greater accuracy whether the school will be operated in a fiscally sound manner during the next charter period, a finding that the Institute is legally required to make.
- At the same time that the Renewal Benchmarks provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute to gather evidence, they also provide the school with a guide to what the Institute is looking for. By giving details to a school, a school has a better sense of what is expected when it comes to renewal. Of course, as the Institute uses the Renewal Benchmarks (or some sub-set of them) during its annual evaluation visits to schools, no school should be surprised by their content.

Precisely how the Charter Schools Institute uses the Renewal Benchmarks, both at renewal and during the charter period, is explained in greater detail in the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University of New York* (Renewal Practices). However, key points as to how they are used at renewal are repeated here.

- The Charter Schools Institute does not have a point system for determining whether a school will be renewed. In other words, a school cannot simply tally up the number of benchmarks it meets to determine whether it will be renewed.
- A large part of why such a tally is impossible is that some benchmarks count more than others. In particular, the State University gives the greatest weight to how well the school met its academic Accountability Plan measures. As such, despite the fact that this comprises only a single benchmark, a school's performance on that benchmark is critical. Indeed, it is so important that while fiscal and organizational failures can cause a school to not be renewed (if sufficiently serious), excellence in these areas will not excuse poor academic performance.
- The Institute does not use every benchmark during every kind of renewal review, and how they are used differs depending on a school's circumstances. For instance, the qualitative academic performance benchmarks (Benchmarks 1B-1F) are given far less weight when a school that has been renewed one or more times previously, applies for renewal again. Similarly, less weight is accorded these benchmarks during an initial renewal review where a school has shown that it has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
- Again as set forth in the *Renewal Practices*, in greater detail, aside from the benchmark regarding meeting the academic Accountability Plan goals (which is singular in its

importance), no school should fear that a failure to meet every benchmark means that the school is not in a position to make a case for renewal. To the contrary, the Institute has yet to see a school—or any institution for that matter—that is perfect in every respect. The Institute appreciates that the benchmarks set a very high standard collectively. While the Institute certainly hopes and expects that schools aim high, it is understood that a school’s reach will necessarily exceed its grasp in at least some aspects.

- As the Renewal Benchmarks indicate, they have been revised over time. The present version is marked Version 3.2. As noted above, the Renewal Benchmarks are indicators and tools used by the Institute to gather information and evidence. And while it is expected that schools pay close attention to them, they are not the be all and end all.

The benchmarks are organized around the four renewal questions which each school must answer in submitting a renewal application. These four questions are inter-connected, to say the least. For instance, many of the benchmarks surrounding academic performance could reasonably be placed under the heading of organizational effectiveness. In the same way, it is hard to separate out whether a board made fiscally sound decisions from whether it made decisions that were programmatically effective. In sum, there is the potential for an artificial quality to creep into the nomenclature that the Institute has chosen to use, and schools are urged not to spend time thinking about where a particular benchmark appears but rather to expend their energies on having a better school. We note that it is precisely for that reason, therefore, that the Institute does not tally the benchmarks and make renewal decisions based on how many a school met or did not meet.

In the same vein, a close reading of the benchmarks will reveal some redundancy. Again because the categories are porous, the redundancy is intentional and often signifies the importance of an issue. Thus for instance, the benchmark regarding “use of assessment data” (Benchmark 1B) includes as a desired quality that the school have made changes to its curriculum and pedagogy where the data indicate gaps in learning and achievement. At the same time, an entire benchmark is devoted to the systems that the school has in place for remediation (Benchmark 1D.3).

While the former element in Benchmark 1B might logically suffice to capture whether a school has a robust and effective remediation program, the separate benchmark makes clear the importance the Institute places on having effective systems for bringing at risk students to grade level. More generally, some redundancy exists because we sometimes are looking at the same issue but using a different focus. An example of this is that in Benchmark 1D.1, we will gather evidence regarding the school leadership’s effectiveness at driving the school to excellence; that same issue is raised again in Benchmark 2C.1, but this time from the perspective of the school board’s performance.

In closing, the Renewal Benchmarks are a key guide for schools and the Institute. As noted above, more specific details on the Institute’s use of the benchmarks are outlined in the Renewal Practices. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any additional questions.

State University Renewal Benchmarks

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Benchmark 1A Academic Attainment & Improvement	1A.1 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.
	1A.2 Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.3 Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.
	1A.4 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.
	1A.5 NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.
Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data	1B The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include: <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 assessments and student work; • 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;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • 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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p data-bbox="321 268 522 300">Benchmark 1D</p> <p data-bbox="358 338 485 369">Pedagogy</p>	<p data-bbox="646 264 1235 331">1D.1 The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p data-bbox="776 348 1313 407">Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul data-bbox="776 428 1339 1444" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="776 428 1339 604">• 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; <li data-bbox="776 625 1339 684">• the school’s leadership has taken concerted and consistent action in line with these priorities; <li data-bbox="776 705 1339 798">• the school’s leadership has in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teachers’ effectiveness and quality; <li data-bbox="776 819 1339 995">• 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; <li data-bbox="776 1016 1339 1192">• 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; <li data-bbox="776 1213 1339 1360">• 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 <li data-bbox="776 1381 1339 1444">• the school’s leadership establishes an environment of high expectations.
	<p data-bbox="646 1499 1224 1566">1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p data-bbox="776 1583 1313 1642">Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul data-bbox="776 1663 1339 1864" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="776 1663 1339 1722">• teachers demonstrate subject-matter competency in the subjects they teach; <li data-bbox="776 1743 1339 1864">• lessons are focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards and reflect a clear understanding of students’ current skill and knowledge;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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 procedures for accessing them; • 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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p align="center">Benchmark 1E</p> <p align="center">Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p align="center">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.
<p align="center">Benchmark 1F</p> <p align="center">Professional Development</p>	<p align="center">1F</p>	<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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?	
Benchmark 2A School Specific Non-Academic Goals	2A	The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).
Benchmark 2B Mission & Design Elements	2B	The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter. Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders are aware of, and can articulate, the mission and key design elements; and • the school has carried out the components of its mission statement and implemented its key design elements.
Benchmark 2C Governance	2C.1	The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and specific goals. Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include: <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 board to provide effective oversight; • 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;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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 made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy, including acting in a timely fashion on such complaints; • 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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p align="center">Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the great majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; • a large number of parents seek entrance to the school; • parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and • students have strong positive attitudes (including an attendance rate exceeding that of comparable public schools).
<p align="center">Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E 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
	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning	<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.
Benchmark 3B Internal Controls	<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;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school identifies and analyzes risks and takes actions to mitigate such risks; • the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out; • 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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<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> <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</p> <p>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.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p style="text-align: center;">Renewal Question 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Should the School’s Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 4A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Key structural elements of the school’s plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a mission statement that reflects the school’s overall plans for the next charter period and evidence the school will be able to fulfill that mission; • yearly and daily schedules which are clearly laid out, provide sufficient instruction time to meet all legal requirements, reflect that they are consistent with, and will allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals, and any resultant expenses are reflected in the school’s proposed budget; • where the school is providing secondary instruction, the requirements for graduation are clearly set out and consistent with the standards set by the Board of Regents; • an enrollment structure that is reasonable, feasible and achievable and consistent with the school’s proposed staffing plan and budget; and • where the school’s enrollment structure provides for significant growth in existing grades, sufficient evidence that the school will be able to meet those proposed enrollment numbers.
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 4B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plans for the Educational Program</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a school that proposes a material redesign to the educational program for the term of the proposed renewal charter: (1) a clearly

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>articulated new design, including research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the school meeting its Accountability Plan goals; (2) a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new design; (3) a detailed review of the plans for curriculum, instruction, assessment, remediation, and professional development; and (4) a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new design will be adequately resourced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a school that seeks to provide instruction in new grades: (1) an outline of the academic program for those grades and the research and evidence that the design will result in the schools meeting its Accountability Plan goals in those new grades; (2) a detailed review of the plans for curriculum, instruction, assessment, remediation, and professional development; and (3) a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new grades will be adequately and appropriately resourced. • the school’s Key Design Elements that lay out the essential elements of the school’s academic program in a comprehensive yet succinct form; • evidence that the school has submitted a proposed Accountability Plan that is consistent with the Institute’s standards for such plans. • for a school that is not seeking to add additional grades, plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period; and • for a school that is seeking to add grades, plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period for those grades that it served during the last charter period.
<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for the Governance Structure</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a set of legally sufficient by-laws.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a code of ethics that details the conduct expected of the school’s stakeholders and sets forth standards and procedures for avoiding and/or handling conflicts-of-interest. • a board organizational chart that is consistent with the school’s by-laws. • if the school is to be no longer associated with the partnering organization with which it filed its original application, it will have explained the reasons for the disassociation and outlined how those functions previously associated with that partnering organization will be handled; • if the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure—whether a Charter Management Organization (CMO) or Education Service Provider (ESP)—or vice-versa, or is changing its CMO or ESP, the school will have provided the information requested in the renewal application guidance (Question 4c) and such information will allow the Institute to conclude that the school will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school. • if the school is making other significant changes to its management or governance structure (such as adding grades and administrative staff) it will explain why that structure will be effective, sound and viable, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school; and • plans that show how it will sustain the performance of its governance model in the next charter period.
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 4D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4 D The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school’s fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p data-bbox="776 262 1307 352">addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.</p> <p data-bbox="776 384 954 415">The plan should:</p> <ul data-bbox="776 432 1323 724" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="776 432 1268 491">• describe all major assumptions used in its development; <li data-bbox="776 510 1198 541">• disclose anticipated staffing levels; <li data-bbox="776 560 1323 619">• be accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions; and <li data-bbox="776 638 1312 724">• include information on enrollment demand to support the reasonableness of projected enrollment.