



Charter Schools Institute  

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State University of New York

# Bronx Charter School for Better Learning Second Year Report

2004-2005

February 21, 2006

## **READER'S GUIDE**

### ***Background***

Authorized by the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998, charter schools are public schools that operate independently 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 empowers 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 to authorize new public charter schools (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor) 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 in the review and approval of applications to establish charter schools, oversight of chartered schools, and renewal of charters.

As are district-organized public schools, charter schools are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees that, as all school boards, is subject to New York State's Freedom of Information and Open Meetings laws. Public charter schools authorized by the State University Trustees are also subject to oversight and monitoring 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.

In exchange for freedom from many State rules and regulations, 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" or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed, in which case it would close. 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 that school districts administer.

### ***The Oversight Process***

As noted above, 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 and other methods.

In addition to monitoring 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, including the strength of their educational programs and organizational structures.

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 school can potentially take corrective actions. In turn, the school may thereby increase the chances that it will be able to fulfill the promises it made in its charter, including meeting those measures of student achievement set forth in its Accountability Plan. The second goal is to disseminate information beyond the school's professional staff and governing board to all stakeholders, including parents and the larger community in which the school is located. The third goal is to allow the Institute to build a data base of information on the school over time. This permits the Institute to better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school – and the likelihood for continued success or failure (as the case may be) based on past patterns when the school comes to renewal, typically in the fifth year of its charter.

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. As the result of the periodic visits and inspections, by the end of the charter period, both the Institute and school will have a mutual sense of the school's strengths and weaknesses as viewed over time, especially as viewed through the prism of charter renewal.

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.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, the Institute utilizes 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 Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret (for instance, it would be difficult to tease out in the first year the value-added that the school has contributed to a student's success on the fourth grade State assessments). The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by

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<sup>1</sup> In the school's first year, the Institute visits the school in the spring and uses many, though not all, of the benchmarks it utilizes during its second year visit as well. The first year visit results in a letter to the school's board of trustees summarizing the Institute's findings. In a charter school's third year, the Institute retains an outside group to provide a more comprehensive review of the school's educational program, outcomes, and various indicators related to organizational effectiveness. This visit results in a formal report to the school's board of trustees that is similar, though not identical, to the second year report.

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.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Second Year Report***

The Second Year Report is the product of the Institute’s visit in the spring of a school’s second year of operation. It contains this reader’s guide, a brief description of the school, a summary of the Institute’s findings from its visit to the school in its first year of operation, a summary of the Institute’s findings and observations from the second-year visit, the evidence gathered under the benchmarks that the Institute utilizes in the second-year visit (from which the summary is drawn) and, finally, data on the visit, including identities of the visitors and the date of the visit.

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 on a second year visit 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. Although issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), compliance is not the ultimate purpose of the visit.

The second year visit includes a meeting with the principal/director, classroom visitations, and interviews of staff, students and board members, in addition to reviewing student work. Data from the second year visit, and any previous visits, is used to develop the curriculum and instruction component of this report.

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;

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<sup>2</sup> More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of this highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

<sup>3</sup> Where a school comes to renewal with an ambiguous data set of outcome assessments (because of limited data, inconsistent data – some strong, some weak – or both), the Institute continues to place emphasis on the qualitative indicators as proxy indicators of future success. Thus, where the Institute finds that qualitative indicators are strong, it may still recommend, despite ambiguous evidence of student achievement on assessment results, that the school be renewed (though not for a full term) because the qualitative indicators suggest that with more time the school will compile a strong data set of student assessment outcomes.

- 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 this operation in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- 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 that school on that 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, the Second Year Report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance that the school is “on track” to be renewed or is not. It does, however, in the “Summary” section, 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 (or reasonably could give) 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. 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.

In sum, then, we urge all readers to review the entire report (or at the very least the entire summary) and not to take a particular comment in the report about the school out of context.

Finally, we note that the Second Year Report cannot serve its three functions (providing data to the school to use for its potential improvement; disseminating information to shareholders; 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**

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning's ("Bronx Better Learning") charter was approved by the State University Board of Trustees on March 25, 2003. The school is located at 3740 Baychester Avenue Annex in the Bronx. Its mission is to provide its students with a "solid foundation for academic success, through achievement that exceeds citywide averages and meets or exceeds New York State standards and national norms in all curriculum areas tested, especially in mathematics and language arts." The school maintains that its "teaching constantly adjusts to the needs of our students, leading to independence, autonomy, responsibility and sustained love of learning, all of which contribute directly to high academic achievement."

### ***Background***

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning opened in September of 2003. For the 2004-05 school year, it moved into the annex of P.S. 111 Seton Falls Elementary, a site that provides enough space for the school's planned expansion.

The charter's Executive Summary states that the school will seek to provide educational opportunity to children with few choices by demonstrating an "approach to education that can dramatically improve the school experience of virtually any child." That approach, *The Subordination of Teaching to Learning*, was developed by Caleb Gattegno, founder of the Gattegno Foundation which is a partner in the school. They believe "at-risk" students have the same powers of learning, but are less likely to tap them in a typical school environment.

The school is closely tied to the Gattegno Foundation. Two of the three original charter applicants, and current board members, are trustees of the Gattegno Foundation. The foundation is a financial partner and has supplied funding for a variety of purposes, including personnel to provide professional development and supplemental teaching to small groups of students as needed.

As of the date of this report, the school's enrollment, demographics and school calendar are as follows:

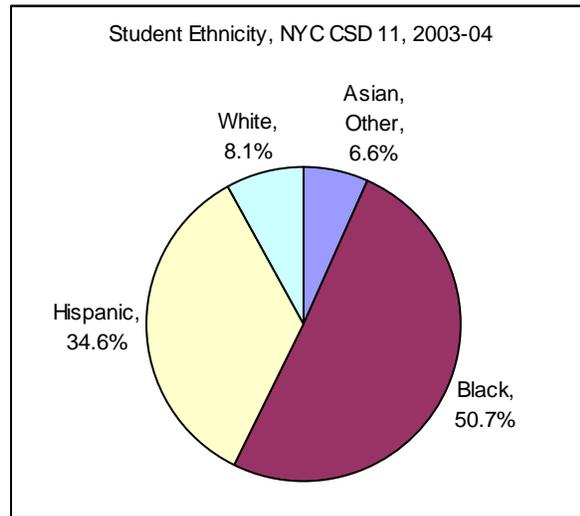
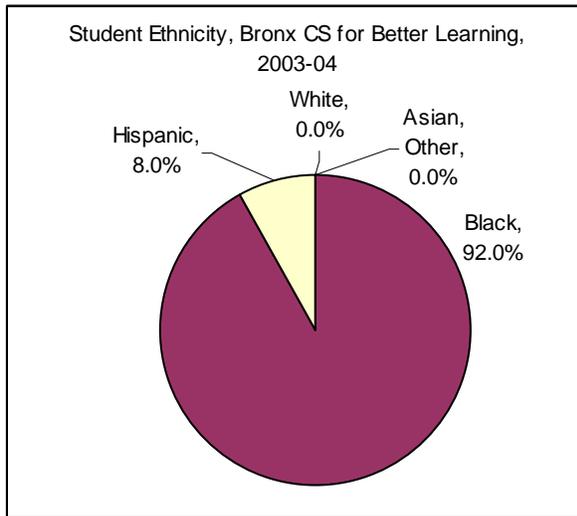
### ***Enrollment***

Parent interest in the school is strong. For the 2005-06 school year, the school will have an enrollment of 152 students, 101 of which are returning students. The school has excellent student retainment; the three students who have left the school did so due to geographic relocations. The school received 216 applications for the 51 available seats, and at the time of the lottery reported 175 students on the waiting list.

YEAR	ORIGINAL CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	APPROVED CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ORIGINAL CHARTERED GRADES SERVED	APPROVED GRADES SERVED	ACTUAL GRADES SERVED
2003-2004	50	50	50	1	1	1
2004-2005	100	100	101	1-2	1-2	1-2
2005-2006	150			1-3		
2006-2007	250			K-4		
2007-2008	250			K-4		

**Demographics**

The ethnicity of Bronx Better Learning’s student population is 92 percent African-American and 8 percent Hispanic. In the New York City Community School District, within whose boundaries Bronx Better Learning is located, the student population is more diverse. Its student population is 50.7 percent Black, 34.6 percent Hispanic, 8.1 percent White and 6.6 percent Other.



**Free Lunch (2003-04)**

Bronx Better Learning	44.0%
Region 2	78.3%

**Students with Disabilities (2003-04)**

Bronx Better Learning	2.0%
Region 2	7.5%

### ***School Calendar***

The school year in the charter would run 182 days, with five and one-half hours of instruction during the school day, from 8:45 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. For 2004-05, the school had a 180 day school year (following the calendar of the New York City School District), and a school day running from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

## **SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR FINDINGS**

In the spring of 2003, at the close of the school's first year of operation, the Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute") conducted a visit of the school. School inspectors 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.

Inspectors concluded that the school had made progress toward its goals of giving students a "solid foundation for academic success," preparing students to be "autonomous" learners, and imparting the "prerequisites" that are necessary "to enter increasingly advanced areas of study." All teachers employed the approach noted in the charter, the *Subordination of Teaching to Learning*.

However, classroom observations indicated various levels of instructional effectiveness. While inspectors did observe students engaged in sustained and rigorous learning, they also observed instances in which students did not receive the type of adaptable instruction which the school's charter describes as molded to the "moment-to-moment needs of each individual student." The school should be mindful of students who are not responding appropriately to its curriculum and instructional methods, and should provide sufficient support so that they are not at risk of falling behind.

Observers cautioned administrators that the "Summative Portfolios" do not provide stakeholders (trustees, parents, etc.) with an adequate running record of success. The school must make clear what each artifact in the portfolio exemplifies. In their current form the portfolios "would not be considered viable evidence towards the school's renewal efforts."

The first year letter noted that the school continued to work to secure the proper evaluation, identification and services for students with special needs. Inspectors stressed the critical nature of this work.

## SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR FINDINGS

### *Academic Program*

#### Strengths

- The school's achievement data are limited to results on the Terra Nova Test in first and second grades. In spring 2005, students scored at about grade level in both reading and mathematics. However, second graders did not make expected progress from their first grade scores. In the previous spring, they had scored above grade level.
- The school has established a portfolio system that has the potential to provide evidence of the extent to which students are attaining school and state standards.
- School staff appears to hold high expectations for student performance.
- Numerous observations of instruction indicate that the school provides its students with opportunities to learn through varied instructional strategies.
- Professional development systems in place and the school has provided substantial opportunity for the staff to work together.
- There is a sense of a maturing school culture typified by mutual respect among staff and students.

#### Areas for Improvement

- While the portfolio system is in place, some teachers do not appear to understand how to use it correctly. The school needs to ensure consistency in its implementation.
- Classroom management is inconsistent, and too often there is an undercurrent of chatter that prevents students from taking full advantage of the learning opportunities.
- The school lacks a formal teacher evaluation process.
- Instructional quality varies across the school and suggests a need for instructional coaching and professional development.
- While the school is committed to the Gattegno approach and is supported by the Gattegno Foundation, it appears that the school has some professional development needs beyond their scope. For example, teachers appear to need assistance in refining their classroom management techniques and in adapting the Gattegno method to a whole class setting.

### *Organization*

#### Strengths

- The school possesses a staff dedicated to the mission and approach of the school.
- The school has a board of trustees that functions as a collaborative of school staff and outside resources. The board has elected officers, holds regular meetings and has functioning committees.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Formal instructional leadership is needed to ensure that the necessary instructional improvement occurs. While the new leadership structure is not yet in place, a review

of the new executive director and principal job descriptions indicates that a dual leadership structure has been designed to address this need.

- The board lacks a formal means to evaluate the school's leadership and programs.

## **BENCHMARKS**

What follows are the selected benchmarks used by the Institute in preparing this report. These benchmarks focus on the critical issues of teaching, learning and assessment as well as organizational and fiscal responsibility. Evidence from visits conducted during the year is summarized under each benchmark and serves as the foundation for the summary section above.

<b>Is the School an Academic Success?</b>	
<b>Benchmark 1A</b>  <b>Academic Attainment &amp; Improvement</b>	<p><b>1A.1.1</b>      <b>Absolute Measures (New York State Assessments):</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.</p> <p><b>1A.1.2</b>      <b>Comparative Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.</p> <p><b>1A.1.3</b>      <b>Value Added Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of the school’s charter.</p> <p><b>1A.1.4</b>      <b>NCLB Measure:</b> The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p> <p><b>1A.1.5</b>      <b>Unique Academic Measures:</b> The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.</p>

As the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning has only operated for two years with first and second graders, it cannot present any achievement results based on the state’s English language arts and mathematics examinations. Currently, the school’s achievement data are limited to results on the Terra Nova Test in first and second grades. In spring 2005, students scored at about grade level in both reading and mathematics.

In its Accountability Plan, Bronx Better Learning includes a value-added outcome measure based on the Terra Nova results. 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. In both spring 2004 and spring 2005, first graders scored above an NCE of 50, meaning that they had technically already closed the gap between their performance and grade level.

However, second graders in spring 2005 did not make progress from their first grade scores. In both reading and math, the second graders scored *below* their level of performance in spring 2004. Among the national sample of students taking the test in both years, students are normally expected to score at least at the same level of performance as they had the previous year.

While they scored at close to grade level on the Terra Nova, they will take the rigorous state tests for the first time in 2005-06.

<p><b>Benchmark 1B</b></p> <p><b>Use of Assessment Data</b></p>	<p><b>1B</b></p> <p><b>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</b></p> <p>A school that fully meets this benchmark will have put in place during the life of the charter a system for the effective use of assessment data. Such a system would include at least the following elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the collection and analysis of student performance data, including data gathered from an analysis of student work pursuant to a set of well-defined and well-aligned standards;</li> <li>● the use of assessment instruments and data to determine accurately whether State performance standards and other academic goals are being achieved;</li> <li>● the use of assessment data to make changes and improvements, where the data indicates a need, to curriculum and instruction;</li> <li>● the regular communication between teachers and administrators of assessment results and a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of those results; and</li> <li>● the regular communication to parents of assessment data to assist them in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement.</li> </ul> <p>More generally, a school should be able to demonstrate a system where performance standards, instruction, required student work and assessments are integrated and have led to increased student achievement.</p>
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***Philosophy***

Bronx Better Learning’s assessment philosophy is based on the school’s belief that children work hard to learn because of the intrinsic value of learning. As such, assessment results should provide students with useful feedback that helps them to learn. The school’s grading system is based on a written narrative evaluation rather than the traditional letter grading of A to F. According to the interview with the school’s principal and the founder, teachers administer qualitative assessments and score them both with comments and scores of right or wrong. The school strongly believes in providing students with not only quantitative feedback, but also qualitative feedback to enhance their understanding.

***Standardized Assessments***

Although the school-based assessments are primarily qualitative, Bronx Better Learning relies on quantitative measures for its accountability plan. Because the school served only first and second grade students during the 2004-05 school year, it did not administer the state fourth grade English language arts and mathematics exams. The state assessment system, however, will change as of the 2005-06 school year to include testing of students in grades three through eight. Therefore, the school will administer state assessments to its third grade students, and subsequently begin to build an objective, externally-verifiable record of student performance.

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning, per its Accountability Plan, administered the Terra Nova as the school’s value-added measure during its first year, 2003-04. The school was scheduled to do so again during the week following the team’s visit. In the 2003-04 school year, students reached the school’s benchmark contained in the Accountability Plan. Teachers are provided detailed analyses of the Terra Nova results, including across grades and individual class areas of strengths and weaknesses.

## ***Portfolios***

Bronx Better Learning has established a portfolio system that has the potential to provide evidence of the extent to which students are attaining school and state standards; however, the system is currently insufficiently implemented. The school has made significant progress in addressing the criticisms of its “Summative Portfolios” contained in the first-year report. During the first-year visit, inspectors noted that while the school had amassed a “healthy collection of student work,” it was not “girded by a system of internal evaluation.” There was no means that “detail[ed] exactly what each artifact exemplif[e]d.” The school was responsive to these criticisms.

The school has created a portfolio system and currently maintains two portfolios for each student: “Working Portfolio” for formative assessment and “Showcase Portfolio” for summative assessment. Inspectors reviewed the Summative Portfolios that record the state standards that have been met and relevant date(s) of work sample(s).

Each portfolio contained a “Skills Outline” that lists the reading/writing and mathematics performance indicators and a space to note the date of portfolio selections that indicate mastery of that performance indicator. Each work sample is accompanied by a cover sheet that notes the “Relevant Curriculum Performance Indicator(s)” and the “Learning Stage Reached,” as indicated by the piece of student work. The stages listed are “Elaboration – Student demonstrates readiness to undertake challenge; multiple errors;” “Consolidation – Student demonstrates increasing skills and confidence; some errors;” and “Extension – Students demonstrate ability to use skill to accomplish further purpose; minimal or no errors.”

While the system is designed to demonstrate student performance in relation to standards, some of the sample student work provided by the school indicates that the system is not clearly understood. For example, a piece of student work in which the student “made sentences using only the words on chart 6” was used to demonstrate Learning Stage 3 of Unfamiliar Words – Writing, “Applies sensible criteria when spelling unfamiliar words.” As the charts contained the words, the student was neither unfamiliar with the words nor was he required to spell those words himself.

Teachers report that they use the portfolios to show parents their children’s performance and progress.

## ***School-Based Assessment Measures***

Teachers and the *Our Story, 2004-2005* binder indicate that the school uses a variety of assessments, including mini-tests, unit tests, and locally developed criterion referenced tests. However, given the brevity of the site inspection visit, inspectors were unable to examine these in detail. Mini-tests, which consist of a single page in length, are administered one or more times a week by the teacher or an instructional assistant under the teacher’s direction. Some of these are teacher-made and others are of the commercial variety. Some are published by Educational Solutions, Inc. to coincide with the literacy and mathematics programs. An inspector observed the administration of a mini-assessment of reading comprehension that included the students reading a passage and answering questions. The Gattegno method includes an assessment component that is used to determine whether students are ready to move from one level/booklet to the next. Although inspectors did not observe such an assessment, interviews made it clear that teachers were familiar with the system. Finally, teachers report that students take pre- and post-test tests at the beginning and end of the year in mathematics and literacy. These assessments were reported to be criterion-based.

Is the School an Academic Success?	
<p><b>Benchmark 1C</b></p> <p><b>Curriculum</b></p>	<p><b>1C</b></p> <p><b>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet the demands of State standards.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has defined with precision the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve (and that are aligned with the relevant State standards) and makes them a priority within the curriculum. Course offerings and outlines reflect those priorities. The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.</p>
<p><b>Benchmark 1D</b></p> <p><b>Pedagogy</b></p>	<p><b>1D.1</b></p> <p><b>Strong instructional leadership girds the school’s work in improving student learning and achievement.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has instructional leadership that has demonstrated the capacity to lead the comprehensive implementation of the school’s curriculum and has facilitated the alignment of classroom instruction, learning activities, instructional resources, support, and assessments. Instructional leaders at the school ensure that teacher planning time, lesson development, and internal assessment systems lead to the successful attainment of the school’s mission and academic goals.</p> <p><b>1D.2</b></p> <p><b>Quality instruction is evident throughout the school fostering an academic learning environment and actively supporting the academic achievement of children.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark is one in which classroom practice reflects competent teaching and instructional strategies that engage students. The academic learning environment at the school is one in which effective teaching and learning are valued and supported; there is a clear and strong focus on achievement goals, and student and staff accomplishments are recognized.</p> <p><b>1D.3</b></p> <p><b>The school has strategies in place to identify and meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure, students not making reasonable progress towards achieving school goals, and students who are English Language Learners.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has implemented special programs and provides the necessary resources to help students who are struggling academically to meet school goals. The programs are demonstrably effective in helping students meet goals.</p>

***Curriculum***

The curriculum of the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning is based on New York State core curriculum, and includes English language arts (reading, writing, and spelling), mathematics, science and social studies. Students also receive instruction in art, music and physical education.

Several of the founding teachers put the curriculum together as part of the charter application process. The school was founded by a team of teachers and administrators who were dedicated to the Gattegno approach and a philosophy that subordinates teaching to learning. In addition, the school has provided substantial opportunity for the staff to work together to ensure consistency of the curriculum.

### ***English Language Arts***

Bronx Better Learning has implemented a unique English language arts program that is based on the Gattegno method of reading, developed by Caleb Gattegno. This method is a consistent approach to English language arts, entitled *Words in Color*. It is currently used in several countries and a few schools in the United States.

Students are taught to read using a color-coded system that incorporates the use of word charts and phonic code charts called Fidels. The curriculum contains lessons designed to develop students' skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. Sounds are first addressed without text, followed by reading from the Fidels. Eventually, students read black and white text. The school states that comprehension is addressed through the use of trade reading books and that teachers build their own comprehension questions around the stories. Teachers reported that students read at different levels based on their performance.

### ***Mathematics***

In the area of mathematics, the school has adopted the state's core mathematics curriculum and has developed a scope and sequence to ensure that instruction is aligned with state standards. As stated in the school's original charter application, instruction materials consist of the Gattegno Mathematics which "reli[es] heavily on the use of manipulatives, primarily Cuisenaire rods." The curriculum is aligned topically with the state standards. For example, lesson plans include the specific state standards being addressed by that lesson. Teachers report the mathematics curriculum is more fluid and that they take direction from the on-site staff developer.

### ***Instructional Leadership***

Based on interviews with teachers, instructional leadership is provided to teachers primarily by the school's founder, who has also served as a classroom teacher during the school's first two years of operation. Teachers look to him both during the formal opportunities scheduled into their days, and also informally when the opportunity arises. While the principal was technically responsible for teacher evaluation, he was yet in the process of becoming more comfortable with the Gattegno materials and methodology at the time of the visit. The principal was primarily responsible for the administrative matters of daily operation of the school.

The school is in the process of establishing a formal system of teacher evaluation. The new executive director is developing a format for annual observations and evaluations as well as self-evaluations. The teacher evaluation process was being formalized at the time of the team's visit. During the school's first year (2003-04), teacher evaluations were more informal. Teachers report that the principal and staff developer both evaluate teachers, although the staff developer makes more classroom visits. This confirms the principal's statement that the staff developer serves as his "eyes in the classroom." While it was reported that the director and staff developer were designing the teacher evaluation, teachers had not yet received any formal feedback at the time of the site visit.

The board intends to move the school to the dual leadership model with the school's founder as executive director and the current principal remaining. While this change was planned for the third year in the charter application, it became clear that the change needed to happen sooner to ensure that all leadership responsibilities could be fulfilled. The executive director will be the leader of the school and will assume primary responsibility for overseeing the educational program. The principal will assist and report to the executive director. His scope of work will focus primarily on the managerial aspects of school leadership, including recordkeeping, facilities, safety, etc.

### ***Instructional Quality***

While Bronx Better Learning's curriculum is consistent across the school, the skill with which it is taught differed. The quality of instruction varied throughout the school. In one first grade science class where students watched a video regarding the life cycle of plants, students were engaged, animated and anxious to respond to questions. The teacher periodically stopped the video to have students read specific words and discuss them, or to have students respond to higher order questions that required the students to integrate the new knowledge. Near the end of the lesson, a first grade student raised his hand and shared his new understanding that plants use the carbon dioxide that people exhale, and that people use the oxygen that plants exhale.

In a second grade math lesson, where the teacher presented a lesson on understanding coins, specifically, pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters, students were less than engaged. The aim of the lesson was to teach students that there are a variety of coin combinations that equal a dollar. The teacher had replicated the student worksheet chart on the board, and asked students to tell her their combinations. She worked through five examples with the class as a whole. However, when the teacher asked students to tell her how much more she would need to make a dollar from \$0.75, they were stumped. One student, in particular, was having a very difficult time understanding the concepts. The teacher, therefore, had the remainder of the students wait as she worked with the one student. Instruction to all, but the one student, ceased for 10 – 15 minutes. The remainder of the class, therefore, had both a reduction in instruction and an opportunity to complete the lesson activity, the worksheet and construction of a booklet around the individual chart.

In several classes, teachers' questioning was highly effective and appeared to promote deep learning. Students were expected to take responsibility for their own learning and to provide evidence for their opinions and responses. In reviewing mathematics homework, the teacher asked the student to demonstrate his method for solving the problem, asked probing questions to encourage him to explain it and asked other students to check his work. In this way, the students did the cognitive work of the lesson rather than relying on the teacher for the answers. However, this was not true in all classes. A few teachers struggled to provide clear directions to students. For example, a teacher attempted to lead the students through a game of "Transformation," a component of the Words in Color method. While she reported that students had played this game before, the students seemed very confused and repeatedly supplied incorrect answers. The students did not appear to be prepared to justify their responses. The teacher did not attempt to explain the entire game again, but rather continued to correct each response. Students fidgeted and chatted during the instruction, significantly reducing the possibility for student learning to occur.

### ***Serving All Students***

In order to address the instructional needs of all students, Bronx Better Learning relies on performance level groups and supplemental instruction. It was unclear to inspectors how the school assists students who do not respond to the Gattegno methods.

All classroom teachers teach English language arts and mathematics, but specific teachers rotate to provide instruction in science, social studies, and art. Music is provided by the school's music teacher to the school as a whole as part of the closing activities of each school day.

In order to meet the needs of students at various levels of performance, students are grouped homogeneously for a portion of academic instruction. Students were divided into groups for literacy and mathematics based on informal observation and beginning of the year assessments. Other portions of the day, such as story time are heterogeneously grouped.

When students fail to make adequate progress in literacy or mathematics, the on-site staff developer also provides supplemental instruction in the form of small group instruction or one-on-one tutoring. If students continue to experience difficulty, Shakti Gattegno, a contracted consultant, may work with them.

When a group of teachers were asked how they addressed the needs of at-risk students, they referred to the work done by the staff developer and the outside expert described above. Only when inspectors specifically asked what teachers did in their own classrooms did they suggest the possibility of sitting with that group while the other students work independently after the demonstration portion of the lesson. [They did not appear to have a repertoire of strategies to use with struggling students.]

### ***Special Populations: Students with Disabilities***

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning enrolled two students with disabilities who had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) at the time of the visit. The school, however, per its charter, requests that the city school district provide special education programs and services. The school has developed a viable relationship with District 2 of the New York City School District. At the time of this visit, the region had issued a Related Services Authorization (RSA) to the parents of one student who requires speech and language services, and the other student received services in support of her learning problems. The school refers students for evaluation when necessary, and

hopes to be able to provide some special education programs and services by the fourth year of the school. The school's founder, and current classroom teacher, is certified in special education. At the time of the visit, the school enrolled no English language learners (ELL).

## Is the School an Academic Success?

<b>Benchmark 1F</b> <b>Student Order &amp; Discipline</b>	<b>1F</b> <b>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</b>  The school that meets this benchmark has documented discipline policies and procedures (for regular and special education students) and has consistently enforced those policies. As implemented and enforced, the discipline policy will have promoted calm, safe classrooms where students are required to (and not distracted from) participating fully in all learning activities. Students at a school meeting this benchmark will also generally report a reasonable sense of security. A school will also be able to provide appropriate records regarding expulsions and suspensions.
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### *Climate*

During the site visit, inspectors noted the respect that teachers demonstrated for their students. The tone of exchange was always polite and courteous. Teachers appeared to hold high standards for students and expected them to grasp the concepts and skills presented. When necessary, teachers paused whole-class instruction in order to ensure that individual students understood. This respect and courtesy provides the foundation for the school's maturing culture. However, the challenge that the school faces is keeping all students engaged during instruction. While there is some evidence of the school's philosophy that students work hard because of the intrinsic pleasure of learning, the philosophy cannot be carried out in full measure unless classrooms are effectively managed.

### *Classroom Management*

Bronx Better Learning prepared a Student Discipline Handbook that details the school rules and disciplinary consequences. While the handbook details school-wide policy, classroom observations revealed inconsistent classroom management. The school has chosen not to implement a school-wide approach to management. Each teacher decides on his/her own how to maintain order and discipline within his/her classroom. The result of this choice is that some teachers are more effective than others in establishing and maintaining an effective learning environment.

In one second grade classroom, the teacher had a warning chart with clips that were moved to indicate student status and if poor behavior is displayed the students lose privileges. In another teacher's class room, she had a "How Is Your Day?" chart. All students start with a blue card, and the color is changed with each subsequent warning: "If a student gets to the final color before lunch, s/he gets no recess." During a science lesson, the teacher did use the threat of calling a student's father to control behavior. Teachers indicated that children are also rewarded for positive behavior through the use of special opportunities, such as playing educational computer games. While the teachers at Bronx Better Learning may have tried numerous techniques to improve classroom management, inspectors' observations indicate that management is still an issue.

Inspectors observed a consistent and chronic low-level of student chatter and fidgeting during lessons. While there were no observed incidents of serious misbehavior, the low level of misbehavior appears to be undermining teaching and learning.

Some of the teachers reported that while they believe in the Gattegno method, it is challenging to translate this belief to a classroom full of children. The established teachers have a full-developed sense of their pedagogical approach. Yet they are still developing the instructional and classroom management skills necessary to implement that approach with a full classroom. If this problem is not addressed soon, it is likely to pose a larger problem as the number of students enrolled grows and the age of the students increases.

### ***Daily Behavior Report***

The school has established a means to communicate students' behavior to their parents, the Daily Behavior Report. At the end of each school day, this report is sent home to parents to be signed and returned the following day. The report includes the following categories: "Moved about the school & classroom safely & sat in seat appropriately," "Followed Directions," "Did not touch others or their property inappropriately," and "Got along well with peers." Teachers also indicated that sending students to the school principal, Mr. Jacobs, is a last resort, as is calling the parents.

Even with the Behavior Report and some teachers' use of other behavioral consequences, a constant din was evident in most classrooms. The noise factor became even more apparent as the day progressed. Numerous students were not fully attuned to the lesson, and teachers struggled to keep them fully engaged in the lessons.

<p><b>Benchmark 1G</b></p> <p><b>Professional Development</b></p>	<p><b>1G.1</b></p> <p><b>The school’s professional development program aligns with the school’s mission, assists teachers in meeting students’ academic needs and school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning and/or teacher content knowledge.</b></p> <p>Professional development offerings at a school that meets this benchmark are aligned with the school’s educational philosophy and are effective in helping teachers improve instruction. Most importantly, professional development practices at the school are a priority of the school leadership and buttress the instructional program, meet student learning needs and result in increased student achievement. The school’s calendar reflects that professional development and instructional planning are a high priority. A school should also be able to demonstrate that necessary support for inexperienced teachers is available. Teachers and school leaders report professional development activities have resulted in gains in teacher pedagogic content, knowledge, and skills and this expertise has led to increased student academic achievement.</p> <p><b>1G.2</b></p> <p><b>The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement that supports the school’s ability to reach the goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</b></p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has leaders who spend extended time in classrooms. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel, support, and opportunities to increase the instructional skills and content knowledge required for the school to meet its academic goals.</p>
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***Professional Development***

The school has provided substantial opportunities for teachers to share and work together. The school provides several forms of professional development: a summer workshop, coaching from on-site staff developer and periodic visits from the “experts” from the Association for the Science of Education. In addition to these professional development opportunities, all teachers meet for one hour everyday at lunch and for an additional hour after school Monday through Thursday.

During the first year of Bronx Better Learning’s operation, three of the four founding teachers were schooled in the Gattegno approach. In the 2004-05 school year, and in future years, there will be teachers who will be unfamiliar with this approach to teaching and learning. For some teachers, the Words in Color method is a “whole new world” and, as such, they must be introduced to a new methodology. Teachers, new to the school, are oriented to the Gattegno methods, including Words in Color and Cuisenaire rods used in teaching mathematics, during a two-week summer session facilitated by one of the original designers of the charter application. In addition, staff discuss teaching and learning issues, share ideas and provide support during their daily common lunch time and during their hour long after school meetings each day, except Fridays.

During the school year, the on-site staff developer visits each teacher's classroom once a week. She observes lessons and provides subsequent feedback. Alternatively, she may model a lesson for the classroom teacher. She is very knowledgeable with regards to the Gattegno method and is able to be a resource for other teachers. However, based on observation, inspectors question the efficacy of relying solely on the staff developer to provide classroom based support in areas beyond matters related to the Gattegno method, such as classroom management and other areas of pedagogy.

In addition to the on-site professional development, teachers report the creators of the Words in Color method and other experts regularly come into the school. The Association for the Science of Education has provided people to provide training in Mathematics and this will continue on an ongoing basis.

Inspectors did not hear any mention of professional development from providers other than those associated with the Gattegno method or the Association for the Science of Education. While it is clear that the school wishes to remain true to its philosophy of education, there may be a need for professional development beyond the scope available through these organizations. For example, it is not clear that there is a means to assist teachers in developing their classroom management skills. Board meeting minutes indicate increased professional development opportunities for teachers. However, it was not clear what these additional trainings entail.

<p><b>Benchmark 2C</b></p> <p><b>Governance (Board of Trustees &amp; School Leadership)</b></p>	<p><b>2C.1</b></p> <p><b>The Board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</b></p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics) and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school’s charter. Where possible, the Board has avoided creating conflicts-of-interest. The school Board has also maintained and abided by the corporation’s by-laws. In addition, a Board meeting this benchmark will have actively sought information from the staff, parents, and community and student populations. The system for hearing such views and concerns will have been consistently implemented so that all views and concerns were appropriately heard and acted upon. The Board will have published, reviewed and communicated policies annually and currently maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p> <p><b>2C.2</b></p> <p><b>The Board and school leadership clearly articulate the school’s mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</b></p> <p>To fully meet this benchmark, school leaders and Board members should be able to evidence a strong understanding of the school design and demonstrate that they have referred to it regularly in managing and governing the school. Moreover, the Board and the school’s administration should have deployed resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school. At the Board level, the Board should have a process for selecting both Board members and the school leader or school leadership team that is timely and effective and such process should result in a stable and effective Board and leadership team. The Board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school Board and school leadership should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.</p>
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Bronx Better Learning has a functioning board that meets regularly but has not yet established the formal procedures necessary to provide oversight of the school’s programs and evaluation of its leadership.

***Meetings /Structure***

The board of trustees of the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning meets regularly once per month, and is structured such that it has a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

The original charter application envisioned a strong role for the staff in the governance of the school, giving teachers four of the nine seats on the board of trustees “to create a school culture as close as is practical and legally permissible to functioning as a cooperative.” While the presence of teachers on the board has the potential to increase collaboration, it is unclear what the actual impact is. The inspectors’ meeting with the board suggested that newer teachers defer to established teachers and that this pattern may limit authentic discussion and the participation of all members.

The board maintains several committees. The Finance and Fundraising committees each meet monthly. The Employment/Personnel committee includes all non-teacher board members and meets at the regular board meetings.

The Policies Committee meets as needed. Board members visit the school and observe classes periodically during the school year, and have participated in the parent orientation sessions to learn of the Gattegno method of teaching and learning.

In September 2004 the school requested and was granted permission to expand the board to 11 members, with no more than 49 percent of the board being employees of the school. The members are seeking to have a board that is diverse in terms of race, background, expertise, and community involvement. In recruiting potential new board members, the current board considers that part of their responsibility is to ensure that the philosophy on which the school was founded is maintained. To ensure that prospective members are knowledgeable regarding the school and its program, they receive written materials on the Gattegno methods, are invited to the parent in-services and visit the school.

### ***Program Oversight***

While board members seem generally familiar with the school performance, there is no established procedure for assessing the school's programs. One of the primary responsibilities of a board is to provide such oversight. Board members report that they receive a report from the principal in advance of each meeting, and a part of the report includes any formal test results. In addition, the principal annually informs the board of standardized test results. With regards to more frequent qualitative indicators of school performance, the board learns about the school's progress through school visits and teachers' anecdotal comments at meetings.

### ***School Leader Evaluation***

Board members reported that they evaluate the principal in two ways. First, on an ongoing basis, they engage in informal discussion, a "daily give and take." Second, there is a formal evaluation with benchmarks. However, this procedure does not appear to be well established as the board members could not name any of the benchmarks. They are in the process of revising the evaluation protocol to more accurately reflect the uniqueness of the school and its curriculum.

### ***School Leaders***

The board intends to move the school to the dual leadership model with the school's founder as executive director and the current principal remaining. While this change was planned for the third year in the charter application, it became clear that the change needed to happen sooner to ensure that all leadership responsibilities could be fulfilled. The executive director will be the leader of the school and will assume primary responsibility for overseeing the educational program. The principal will assist and report to the executive director. His scope of work will focus primarily on the managerial aspects of school leadership, including record-keeping, facilities, safety, etc.

<p><b>Benchmark 2E</b></p> <p><b>Legal Requirements</b></p>	<p><b>2E</b></p> <p><b>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</b></p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>
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The Institute undertook a limited compliance review consisting of a review of information in the files of the Institute and State Education Department (SED) correspondence regarding the school. In January of 2005, SED noted the school's SAVE Plan was not complete and on file with SED. As reflected in the Institute's files, neither the school nor SED has confirmed that this issue has been fully resolved. Recently, SED notified the school that it had not submitted by the April 2005 deadline required information regarding any violent or disruptive incidents at the school. The Institute assisted the school in submitting the required information to SED in late August, and, to date, there has been no adverse action regarding this issue.

Through June 30, 2005, the school had presented a stellar record of submitting information to the Institute in a timely manner as provided for in the school's charter with no item being more than five days late save for its 2003 facilities agreement that was 24 days late. To our knowledge, the school has not had any complaints lodged against it.

A review of the school's bylaws revealed no explicit deficiencies. The bylaws implicitly allow for an executive committee of only three trustees as opposed to the five required under the Education Law, but there is no evidence of improper constitution of such a committee. A terse review of board minutes demonstrated substantial compliance with the bylaws and with the Open Meetings Law including proper use of executive session.

According to the Institute's records, except as set forth above, the school has not been found in material violation of its charter, the Charter Schools Act, applicable provisions of the New York Education Law and other New York law, applicable federal law (e.g., I.D.E.A., F.E.R.P.A.), and its bylaws.

Is the School Fiscally Sound?		
Fiscal Benchmarks	3A	The Board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school's mission, program and goals.
	3B	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.
	3C	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.
	3D	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.
	3E	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).

On May 13, 2005, Mr. Bill Lake, Director of Fiscal and Regulatory Accountability for the Institute, met with Mr. Shubert Jacobs, school director of the Bronx Charter School Better Learning and Dr. Ted Swartz, teacher and board of trustee member. Also attending the meeting was Ms. Andrea Mills a consultant to the school from Fiscal Management Associates, Inc. In addition to documentation at the school, previously submitted reports and documents were also reviewed.

A review of the board minutes for the school shows evidence of the board's active role in the school's financial operations. School finance updates are given at virtually all board meetings and the board participates in the development the annual budget and reviews and approves it.

In October 2004, the board established an audit-finance committee with three members in response to a management letter comment from the school's independent certified public accountant (CPA). The committee's responsibilities are not specifically delineated, but include the annual audit, the budget and other financial matters, and these issues are discussed at regular board meetings. The school's independent CPA presents the results of the audit to the board annually.

Since its inception, the school has operated pursuant to its long range fiscal plan included in its application. The School completed its first operating year in fair financial position and operated on a balanced budget. Both revenues and expenses were less than the amounts budgeted and actual revenues exceeded actual expenses. The school had a net operating deficit from school operations of \$58,921. Including contributions (net of fundraising expenses) and other income, the school had a net surplus (unrestricted) of \$19,411. The school generated positive cash flow from operations of \$25,663 and invested \$120,352 in the purchase of property and equipment. Unaudited quarterly statements for year two indicate the School is on track to improve its financial position.

Internal control can be expected to provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance to the school's management and board that objectives will be achieved. The school has established and adopted a Fiscal Policy and Procedures Manual. The manual, while comprehensive, could be improved by updating and clarifying several of its parts. The school has a system to record, track and safeguard assets has been established but not fully implemented.

The audit report opinions for the school's start-up and first year were unqualified, indicating the financial statements were fairly presented, in all material respects, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The school has filed its required financial reports and budgets in a complete and timely manner. However, the school did not submit a corrective plan to address the management letter comments it received from its independent CPA in conjunction with the audit.

The school has a few areas it can improve to enhance its fiscal soundness. The most significant improvement opportunities relate to:

1. Updating the school's financial practices manual and revising certain of its policies and procedures.
2. Ensuring that a corrective plan is submitted to the Charter Schools Institute in a timely manner (within 30 days) to address any reportable conditions or management letter comments addressed to the board as part of the audit.
3. Ensuring that board packages, in addition to board minutes, are submitted in a timely manner to the Charter Schools Institute as required by the monitoring plan in the school's charter. (Note: the school has begun to comply with this subsequent to the site visit.)

## **VISIT DATA**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second Year Visit at Bronx Charter School for Better Learning on May 26, 2005. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

### **JENNIFER SNEED, PH.D.**

*Vice President for Applications, Charter Schools Institute*

Dr. Sneed is a veteran educator with 29 years of experience as a public school special education teacher and administrator [Illinois & 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.

### **SUSAN SEYMOUR**

*Special Assistant to the Executive Director, Charter Schools Institute*

Susan Seymour is the Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the Charter Schools Institute, State University of New York. In the past Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **HILLARY JOHNSON, ED.D.**

*Consultant*

Ms. Johnson presently is employed by SchoolWorks as a consultant to the School District of Philadelphia. Here she is designing videos of excellent literacy instruction and video-based professional development to support principals in developing instructional monitoring skills and school quality review to aid instruction and planning.

In the past she was a literacy content coach with Marshall & Manning Elementary schools, Adams Elementary School and several Boston Public Schools. She was also a bilingual Spanish teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher.

Ms. Johnson has her B.A. from University of California, Berkeley, her M.A. from Harvard Graduate School of Education and her Doctorate of Education – Urban Superintendents Program from Harvard University.