

## Independent School Evaluation Visit Reports

Attached is a school evaluation report based on a school visit conducted by an external vendor on behalf of the Charter Schools Institute. School evaluation visits are a key component of the Institute's comprehensive oversight and evaluation system. They provide an assessment of the school's academic program and, to a more limited degree, its organizational and governance capacity. The objectives of the school evaluation visit are to:

1. Collect and document evidence of the school's progress toward meeting the academic and organizational standards found in the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks; and
2. Provide the school with feedback on its current achievement of the Renewal Benchmarks that may be helpful to the school as it determines how best to improve its program in anticipation of renewal.

The Institute engages external vendors to conduct an independent school evaluation visit and write an evaluation report at least once during a school's first charter term, and occasionally in subsequent charter terms. These evaluations provide the Institute with additional information about a school's program from an objective external perspective and serve to inform, corroborate or challenge conclusions drawn from the Institute's ongoing evaluation and oversight.

The vendors are selected through a competitive bidding process, and must demonstrate the capacity to conduct rigorous and reliable qualitative evaluation of a school's academic program and organizational capacity. The vendors are contracted to specifically collect and analyze evidence pertaining to the following SUNY renewal benchmarks<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Academic Success</b>	<b>Organizational Effectiveness and Viability</b>
1B. Use of Assessment Data 1C. Curriculum 1D. Pedagogy 1E. Instructional Leadership 1F. At-Risk Students 1G. Student Order & Discipline 1H. Professional Development	2A. Mission & Key Design Elements 2B. Parents & Students 2C. Organizational Capacity 2D. Board Oversight 2E. Governance

While specific evaluation methodology is left to the discretion of the vendor, the school evaluation visits typically include classroom observation, interviews with teachers, parents, school leaders and board members, and review of relevant documents. The attached report was written by a vendor based on evidence collected during a school evaluation visit, with the school description section provided by the Institute. The school had an opportunity to review a draft of this report and provide factual corrections and comments prior to the finalization of the report.

Other evaluation reports for this or other schools can be found on the Institute's website at [www.newyorkcharter.org](http://www.newyorkcharter.org). For questions or concerns about this report or the Institute's school evaluation procedures, please contact Simeon Stolzberg, Director of School Evaluation, at [simeon.stolzberg@suny.edu](mailto:simeon.stolzberg@suny.edu) or 212-221-6332.

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<sup>1</sup> These reference version 4.0 of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks; the latest version can be found on the Institute's website at: <http://newyorkcharters.org/documents/renewalBenchmarks.doc>



Charter Schools Institute  
*The State University of New York*

# **Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School**

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## **School Evaluation Report 2008-2009**

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## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides an overview of the primary conclusions of the evaluation team regarding this year’s visit to the school. The second section, titled School Description, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. Finally, this report presents the evidence and conclusions from an evaluation visit conducted in the current school year in a third section, titled School Evaluation Visit. Within this section is a summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations.

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

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

Based on the analysis of evidence gathered during an evaluation visit to the Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School (“Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant”) on May 7, 2009, the school appears to be making substantial progress towards achieving its mission. Although this conclusion is drawn from a variety of indicators, which are discussed more fully later in this report, some of the more salient indicators include the following:

### *Academic Success*

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant regularly administers a variety of diagnostic, formative and summative assessments, including nationally norm-referenced Terra Nova assessments, the DIBLES and TRC elementary literacy assessments as well as school-created internal assessments aligned to school curricula and pacing guides. The collection, analysis and use of data from these assessments by teachers and school leaders is purposefully and effectively interwoven into the school-wide and classroom level decision making processes. In particular, results from these assessments are used to identify and group students for remediation and intervention.

The school has a clear set of learning objectives aligned to state standards; however, the curriculum is a work in progress and is not yet fully vertically aligned. A variety of school-created and commercial resources are available for teachers to use in planning lessons and teachers have substantial responsibility for continuing to develop and refine the curriculum. Teachers plan and implement purposeful lessons and students are cognitively engaged in rigorous instruction. Observed instruction was differentiated to meet the needs of students primarily by grouping.

School leaders have set high expectations for student and teacher performance and conduct regular observations, though the level of support for individual teachers varied, with significant resources dedicated to novice teachers. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant has in place a process for conducting detailed mid-year teacher evaluations, though at the time of the visit not all teachers had been evaluated. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant has dedicated substantial resources to professional development, particularly for novice teachers, including in-depth training sessions during the summer prior to the start of the school year, ongoing coaching and mentoring throughout the school year, and has made available opportunities for teachers to attend external trainings and workshops.

The school’s Response to Intervention program provides a clear procedure for identifying students with special needs and is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically. The school’s Learning Support Coordinator provides teachers with training to meet these students’ needs.

A safe and orderly environment has been established throughout the school building. Transitions in classrooms and hallways are quiet and marked by swift and efficient procedures. Teachers employed effective classroom management strategies to establish an environment where learning is clearly valued and low-level misbehavior is not tolerated.

### *Organizational Capacity*

Since its second year of operation the school has contracted Uncommon Schools, Inc., a not-for-profit educational management organization. Uncommon provides the school with a broad range of services including: a managing director; development and implementation of the academic program and assessment protocol; recruitment of staff and professional development.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant is competently managed and provides significant resources to teachers. The school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability and is beginning to define mid-tier leadership, though these roles are not yet fully defined. The school has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel. It has maintained adequate enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school. The school's board of trustees is clearly focused on student achievement and possesses a wide variety of skill sets with which they competently govern the school.

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York approved the application to establish Leadership Preparatory Charter School on July 15, 2005, which became effective by operation of law on December 11, 2005. Note: The school requested, and the State University Trustees approved, a charter revision to change the school's name to: Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School ("Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant") in March 2009.

After one planning year (2005-06), the school opened on September 5, 2006 with an enrollment of 116 students in Kindergarten and first grade. The school added one grade in 2007-08 and currently serves 248 students in Kindergarten through third grade. The school plans to continue expanding by one grade in each year of its initial charter, growing to serve a maximum enrollment of 400 students in Kindergarten through fourth grade by the 2009-10 school year. The founders of the school ultimately envision a K-8 school. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of 600 Lafayette Avenue in Brooklyn.

As of the date of the current evaluation visit, the school's board of trustees was comprised of the following individuals:

- Mr. Tokumbo Shobowale, Chair;
- Mr. Jeffrey Wetzler;
- Ms. Ruth Meyler;
- Ms. Caroline Curry;
- Ms. Carrie Abramson;
- Ms. Gail Brousal;
- Mr. Richard Buery;
- Mr. Ben Esner;
- Mr. Michael Hall;
- Mr. John King;
- Mr. Matthew Klein;
- Mr. Joseph Lewis;
- Ms. Renee Muir;
- Mr. Dyrnest Sinckler;
- Mr. John King (Ex Officio); and
- Mr. Max Koltuv (Ex Officio).

The mission statement for Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School is as follows:

*Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School ensures academic success for children by fostering unparalleled academic success in elementary and ultimately, middle school. We prepare our students to excel in demanding, college-prep high schools. Through educational achievement in high school and college, our students earn opportunities in life for themselves and prepare to contribute as leaders in their communities.*

The school's original application did not include a provision for a partnership with an educational management organization. However, in September 2006, the school's board of trustees requested, and the State University Trustees approved, a modification to the charter which would allow a contract with Uncommon Schools, Inc. ("USI"), a not-for-profit educational management organization, for the development and implementation of the school's educational program.

USI provides the school with a broad range of services including: a managing director, responsible for supervising and managing the head of school and principal and for managing and implementing the academic and non-academic operations of the school; development and implementation of the academic program and assessment protocol; recruitment of staff; professional development; school inspection services; budgets; reporting requirements; coordination of audit services and back office functions; technology coordination; fund development, facility management, and marketing/advocacy.

Key design elements of Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant, as outlined in the school's charter include<sup>1</sup>:

- expecting excellence;
- recruiting, developing, and retaining great teachers;
- assessing early and often to inform effective instruction;
- focusing on literacy;
- utilizing research-proven curricula;
- making more time, helping students until they master skills;
- helping students envision a bright future, inspiring them to achieve;
- providing structure and order;
- developing character; and
- involving families.

As part of the school's academic program, both a master teacher and teaching assistant are designated to lead kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms.

### **School Year (2007-08)**

186 instructional days

### **School Day (2007-08)**

7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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<sup>1</sup> The Charter's Executive Summary indicates the founders of the school developed the key programmatic elements by visiting and studying the following successful schools: Amistad Academy (New Haven, CT), the KIPP schools, North Star Academy (Newark, NJ), Bronx Prep, Roxbury Prep (Boston, MA), South Boston Harbor Academy (Boston, MA), the Academy of the Pacific Rim (Boston, MA), Lawrence Community Day Charter School (Lawrence, MA), The Marva Collins Preparatory Charter School (Milwaukee, WI), Kew-Bennett Elementary (Los Angeles, CA), Earhardt Elementary (Chicago, IL), and PS 141 The Grown School (New York, NY).



## Enrollment

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Complying
2005-06	Planning year		Planning year	Planning year	Planning year
2006-07	128		116	K-1	Yes
2007-08	192		170	K-2	Yes
2008-09	256	249	248	K-3	Yes

## Demographic Data<sup>3</sup>

	2006-07		2007-08	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #13 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of CSD #13 Enrollment
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	1	0	1
Black or African American	93	64	96	63
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0	14	0	15
Hispanic	6	15	3	15
White	1	6	1	7
Multiracial	0	0	0	0
<b>Special Populations</b>				
Students with Disabilities	5	11	13	N/A
Limited English Proficient	0	4	1	4
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>				
Eligible for Free Lunch	49	61	41	60
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	17	10	24	10

<sup>2</sup> Actual enrollment per the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the New York State Education Department School Report Card and Database, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, may represent slightly different enrollment levels depending on the date in which this data was collected.

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2006-07, 2007-08 School Report Cards (New York State Education Department). Note: The State Education Department does not report special education data.

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT**

### **Background**

Regardless of the type of visit, Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are organized around a set of benchmarks that address the academic success of the school including teaching and learning, e.g. curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline. Called the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks, these established criteria are used on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

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

This section of the School Evaluation Report begins with a summary of the observations and conclusions from previous visits to the school. This information is used by evaluation teams in preparation for the visit and assists the observers in understanding the accomplishments and challenges that the school has faced. Similarly, this information provides the reader with insight into the Institute's monitoring of the school's academic program and conclusions from prior visits, including those conducted by external experts on behalf of the Institute. Following this summary is a detailed analysis of the observations and conclusions from this year's evaluation, along with supporting evidence. Finally, information regarding the conduct of the evaluation, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team is provided.

### **Summary of Previous Evaluation Visits**

An independent evaluation of Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant was conducted by SchoolWorks on behalf of the Institute on April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members, teachers, parents and students; and reviewed student work and other documents. A report was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit, which are briefly summarized below.

The review team concluded that, at the time of the evaluation visit, Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant was high functioning in instructional practice, management and organizational structure. The school had established a strong culture and a strong instructional practice across grade levels, supported by detailed systems of curriculum, assessment and professional development. School leadership and board governance worked effectively at Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant.

Reviewers found that the school had a strong instructional program supported by an unusually detailed and comprehensive set of curriculum guides and research-based professional development. The school had also established a systematic and comprehensive process for compiling and analyzing assessment data, both formative and summative, which was used to monitor student progress and to make improvements to school curriculum and instructional practice.

The evaluation team found that instructional practice throughout the school was consistently strong, which resulted in steady academic growth of students on all levels. Although observers found minimum evidence of critical thinking activities in several classrooms, this issue was being addressed by school leadership and the teaching staff. The school had strong and supportive instructional leadership that was evidenced in all aspects of curriculum and instruction and a comprehensive system for supervision and evaluation that ensured consistently strong instructional practice in all classrooms.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant had a strong culture that promoted learning and high student achievement. Routines, procedures and expectations were internalized by students in all grades. There was a sense of fun and warmth within a culture of discipline and respect. The school also had programs that were demonstrably effective in helping students who were struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals. Students receiving intervention were making steady gains.

Stakeholders in the Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant community were clear on the overall vision and mission of the school. Parent/guardians and students were very satisfied with all aspects of Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant. The board of trustees had implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and had abided by them to achieve the school's mission and specific accountability goals. Board members were committed and dedicated to the continued success and growth of the school.

### **Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence**

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

The school regularly administers diagnostic, formative and summative assessments. School-developed internal assessments are given every 8 to 10 weeks and are designed to align with the Terra Nova in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and with the New York State English language arts and mathematics exams in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The nationally norm-referenced Terra Nova assessment is given at the end of each school year and used to measure year-to-year growth. End of unit assessments from commercial curricula as well as teacher-developed tests and quizzes are also used to measure student understanding.

The school uses the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) tests to measure students' reading fluency, decoding ability and level of reading comprehension. Incoming kindergarten students take the DIBELS as a diagnostic assessment for reading group placement purposes, and follow up assessments are administered at three points during the year in other grades. In the coming year, the school plans to use the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) assessment to measure student literacy. School leaders chose the STEP assessment because it is designed to identify a student's overall reading level and individual skill deficits, and it provides a set of tools to guide remediation.

Bi-monthly formal writing assessments are graded using a school-wide rubric aligned to New York State standards. These writing assessments are supplemented in some classes by Grammar Crunch, an exit ticket strategy used to target specific skills with which students have particular difficulty and have not yet mastered.

In addition to formal school-wide assessments, teachers reported collecting a variety of informal formative assessment data in class. Exit tickets, conferencing and observation were used by teachers in all subjects, and teachers relied heavily upon a variety of questioning techniques in order to spontaneously check for understanding.

The school has effective procedures in place to systematically collect and analyze assessment results. Following the administration of school-wide interim assessments, teachers are responsible for scoring and disaggregating student level data and performing item analysis using spreadsheets developed by a strategy consulting firm. Teachers and administrators reported that these color-coded spreadsheets are a powerful tool that facilitates the analysis of data as well as plans for re-teaching and remediation. These spreadsheets are stored on a shared network drive and are available for all teachers and service providers to review as needed. Results from literacy assessments are tracked in a similar fashion. Using disaggregated student level data as well as item analysis, teachers develop written data plans detailing how they intend to address individual, small group and whole class deficiencies using re-teaching and targeted intervention.

The school pays particularly close attention to the results of students who have been identified for intervention and pull-out support services. The school's learning support coordinator relies upon poster-sized printouts of student level results which show absolute status and progress over time to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions provided. School-wide data on key performance indicators are also presented in dashboard format monthly and discussed at school leadership team meetings as well as board meetings.

Within classes, teachers use assessment results to group students, identify content in need of re-teaching, create small flexible groups with similar needs for targeted support, and select students for during- and after-school tutoring. In observed lessons, teachers used a data-driven approach to work with small groups of students during reading and mathematics instruction. The school's simultaneous teaching method, providing for two teachers in a classroom, allowed for a reduced student-to-teacher ratio and provided opportunities for more personalized attention and targeted instruction to meet students' individual needs. Teachers reported that these groups were flexible and changed based on students' performance on the most recent set of assessments. Groups were not only used to target students in need of additional support,; teachers reported that groups of high performing students were also created to provide enrichment. For example, observers noted the presence of a reading group containing students from both 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes who were working above grade level and were provided with more challenging texts and material.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant teachers reported the regular use of both formative and summative assessment results to guide the re-teaching of content that students had not yet mastered. For example, a mathematics teacher reported that Friday mathematics sessions are used to teach supplemental lessons geared toward concepts with which a majority of students were struggling, as evidenced by the Terra Nova assessment results. In another class, observers noted that weekly exit ticket assessments were used to assess students' mastery of the "Grammar Crunch" focus for the week.

According to the school's learning support coordinator, DIBELS and TRC assessments are used to benchmark student performance at the beginning of each year and to measure progress throughout the year. In addition, students performing in the lowest quintile on these assessments are identified for progress monitoring, and subsequent results inform intervention decisions made by the school's learning support team.

Student performance results are regularly shared with parents via progress reports and report cards. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant teachers and administrators used a systematic approach to maintaining communication with parents and families to share individual student performance data as well as school-wide results. During the 2008-09 school year, report cards were distributed to parents on a quarterly basis during face-to-face meetings with teachers. Prior to the end of the school year, the school notified parents of those students in danger of being retained due to low academic performance, and teachers provided additional strategies for parents to use at home to remediate these deficiencies. During subsequent meetings, teachers and parents set individualized goals and developed action plans for the remainder of the school year.

In addition to regularly scheduled parent communication, the school encourages regular informal communication with parents and all Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant teachers are required to maintain a monthly parent contact log documenting this communication. Observed logs were up-to-date and contained numerous entries. Additionally, newsletters detailing school-wide and class level achievements, including reading log totals and homework completion rates, are distributed to parents on a weekly basis.

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

The school has a clear set of learning objectives aligned to state standards. However, the curriculum is a work in progress and is not yet fully vertically aligned from grade to grade. A variety of school-created curricular documents guide teachers' instructional planning, including year-long pacing guides and detailed scope and sequence documents that are aligned to New York State performance standards and list required lesson objectives for each subject and grade level. Individual lessons and units are drawn from a variety of commercial curricular programs or are developed in-house by school staff. The school has begun to vertically align the various pieces of the curriculum and teachers and school leaders indicated that this is a priority for the coming summer.

The Reading Mastery program provides scripted lessons in decoding and comprehension as well as materials to implement the school's guided reading program. Elements from lessons developed by the Urban Education Exchange (UEE) and Nancy Boyle's Concepts of Comprehension are used to enhance the school's reading comprehension program. Waterford Early Reading software is used to provide computer-based instruction during one reading block rotation. The Saxon mathematics program is used as the school's mathematics curriculum. In both reading and mathematics, teachers are responsible for developing supplemental materials that provide additional practice and extension activities.

For science and social studies, referred to by the school as "core" classes, teachers develop lessons based on objectives pulled directly from the school's scope and sequence documents. Scott Foresman texts are used as a resource in both subjects.

The school's writing curriculum is based on the Units of Study by Lucy Calkins. School leaders noted that the Units of Study did not provide explicit instruction in writing mechanics and grammar and, in response to this need, teachers have begun to provide supplemental instruction using multi-sensory grammar activities. This summer, the school leader plans to conduct an in-depth review of the writing curriculum with the goal of formulating a more unified curriculum.

Pull-out interventions utilize additional supplemental reading and mathematics curricula. The Wilson Foundations program is used to develop students' phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling abilities. In mathematics, Stern Structural Arithmetic, a multi-sensory and manipulative-based approach to developing students' number sense, is used. The Second Step violence prevention program and the Heartwood Ethics Curriculum are used as the school's character education program and provide lessons aimed to develop students' social and emotional skills and ethical behavior.

In interviews, teachers and school leaders consistently reported that there was more work to be done around vertical alignment of the school's curriculum, especially in core subjects. One teacher reported that vertical planning is "something that we haven't done a lot of" and that the school is "just getting started" on that work. Another noted that "[the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade curriculum does not] have very strong/formal connections with 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade curricula." Another teacher identified vertical planning as a challenge and said that the school needs a clearer curriculum because of staff turnover. The alignment of core (i.e., science and social studies) classes was singled out as an area for improvement; one teacher said that because teachers don't know the depth of content students have been taught in previous years, there is a tendency to underestimate what students already know when planning lessons.

Teachers and school leaders reported that the writing curriculum had been aligned from grade to grade and that clear expectations had been set for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade, with subsequent grades building upon skills developed in previous years. School leaders indicated that they planned to address the alignment issue in other subjects during the summer recess and throughout the next school year. The school's staff developer reported having begun to align a portion of the curriculum and expected to continue her work through the summer.

As the school's curricula is based on both scripted and school-created materials, teachers' responsibility for instructional planning varies by subject and "syllabi" provide a common framework for lesson planning. These syllabi provide an abbreviated description of the week's lessons and list necessary instructional materials and texts as well as brief descriptions of the activities and methods employed to introduce material and provide for guided and independent practice. Questions used to check for student understanding are also included. Given that reading lessons are drawn mainly from scripted programs, common school-created syllabi are available for use by teachers. For mathematics, grade-level team members take turns developing weekly syllabi with activities aligned to meet objectives defined by the school's scope and sequence. Teachers develop their own plans in core classes. Some teachers reported that they plan and implement the same lessons as other teachers in their grade level but also indicated that this is not expected or required.

Teachers submit syllabi to a central e-mail box on Mondays, one week before the lessons are scheduled to take place. The school's special project coordinator tracks submission of these plans. Feedback on submitted lessons is provided on an as-needed basis by a number of school personnel, including the staff developer, the dean of students and the co-director for instruction. A variety of supports are available for teachers in the development of syllabi, and interviewed teachers reported feeling well-resourced in the lesson planning process. In all but the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, previous versions of weekly syllabi and unit plans are available for teachers to use as a model. The 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers have used models created by Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant, another member of the Uncommon Schools network serving kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students.

The school has a process in place to develop new and refine existing curricula. School leaders distribute formal requests for proposals (RFPs) prior to the end of the school year for selected curriculum development projects to take place during the summer. Interested teachers apply and submit proposals to work on the selected projects. School leaders reported that the process is “pretty exhaustive” and involves work in nearly every subject at every grade level. This summer, school leaders expect to spend four weeks in August working on curriculum development for the new 4<sup>th</sup> grade and on the continued refinement of existing curricula.

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

The school employs a “simultaneous” teaching model that provides for two teachers in every classroom. Senior teachers serve as “lead teachers,” while junior teachers are simply referred to as “teachers.” Instructional and planning responsibilities are shared among co-teachers and divided at the pair’s discretion. In observed classes, co-teaching partners implemented purposeful lessons and students were cognitively engaged in rigorous instruction throughout the school. Teachers were enthusiastic, and lessons were highly structured. In observed lessons, nearly all students were attentive and focused on the task at hand. When student attention waned, teachers successfully used a variety of techniques to re-engage students and refocus their attention.

School leaders reported having prioritized the use of questioning techniques that promote the development of higher order thinking skills; there was evidence that teachers are incorporating these strategies into instruction, though their skills varied. During both small-group and full-class settings, a variety of questioning techniques were employed, including literal recall as well as questions which required more complex inferencing, predicting and justifying. In many lessons, when students struggled to come up with an answer, teachers provided them with ample wait time and gave clues or rephrased questions rather providing outright answers. For example, one 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher spent a significant portion of time helping her students figure out what “potted” meant by asking them questions about context clues in the text. She told students that “you need to put the clues together; I’m not going to do it for you.” The students eventually came up with the correct answer, and the teacher reviewed the importance of context in building meaning while reading.

Seeking to promote consistently rigorous instruction, school leaders have provided abundant support to train teachers in the use of questioning strategies and techniques designed to elicit deeper understanding in students. In interviews, teachers regularly reported an intentional focus on developing these questioning techniques during professional development workshops, observation and feedback cycles, and coaching and modeling sessions. For example, a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher reported that during one-on-one coaching sessions with the dean of students, she has been working on her use of follow-up questions with the goal of having students do the majority of the intellectual work during lessons. She reported being asked to script questions she planned to ask during read-alouds and during reading comprehension lessons. Further evidence of this systematic approach to questioning was evident during mathematics lessons; teachers reported creating “framing questions” that mapped backwards from lesson objectives and then using scaffolding questions accordingly to build independent understanding along the way. A new teacher reported that following her formal evaluation, the school leader asked her to observe another teacher to learn how “not to lead [her students] so much.” After observing the other teacher, she has begun to imitate some of the observed strategies in her class with success.

While the desired questioning strategies were observed to be in use in some classrooms, inspectors did observe other teachers who were less successful in employing the desired strategies. In a science

lesson on force and motion, for example, the teacher asked students, “Which is harder to throw, a heavier object or a lighter one?” When a student provided the correct answer, as a follow up, the teacher asked, “Why?” When students did not provide an acceptable answer to the question, rather than attempt to elicit the answer in a different way or to probe students’ depth of understanding, the teacher simply asked students “Why?” repeatedly.

Observed instruction was differentiated to meet the needs of students primarily by grouping. The presence of two teachers in classrooms allowed for the creation of small learning groups with differing instructional objectives and methods. As such, students spend a substantial portion of each day in small, flexible, four- to eight-student learning groups differentiated by ability based on interim assessment data. Grouping practices varied by grade level and by subject, with each grade level determining the appropriate grouping structure and arrangement necessary to meet their students’ particular needs.

For reading instruction, classes are split into three ability level groups. Two groups work on Reading Mastery and reading comprehension activities, each with their own teacher, while the third group works independently using instructional computer software. In kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, the school’s music teacher, social worker and director of special projects teach Reading Mastery groups along with classroom teachers in order to further reduce the student-to-teacher ratio.

Similarly, mathematics instruction takes place in small groups. However, not all grades use the same grouping method and the methods were reported to vary based on internal assessment results. For example, at the time of the visit, in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, mathematics instruction took place in four groups of students pulled from two classes. A 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher reported that after a recent round of assessments, they noticed that the class had some very high and very low performers. These higher and lower performing students were separated into two small instructional groups taught by the teachers, while the remaining students were divided into two groups and taught by the lead teachers.

Students in need of intervention services receive supplemental instruction during small group pull-out sessions led by the school’s learning specialist and coordinator. Additional supports are provided during both in-school and after-school tutoring sessions.

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

The school leaders have set high expectations for student and teacher performance. These expectations are evident throughout the school and are regularly reinforced. Students are expected to participate in the learning process and are held responsible for their learning; teachers understand that teaching is a public practice and share a common goal of excellence.

School leaders have set clear instructional priorities, which are communicated and reinforced during weekly professional development sessions, as well as clearly articulated school-wide initiatives. These initiatives focus on student growth and achievement; school leaders reported thinking constantly about how to improve more quickly. For example, a key priority for the current school year is to ensure that every teacher incorporates rigorous questioning techniques into his/her pedagogy. Interviewed teachers were knowledgeable about this initiative and able to describe how they were incorporating the work into their teaching.

Student achievement results are posted and available for viewing by all. Teachers reported setting classroom and school-wide goals for various assessments and tracking progress towards these goals



publicly. For example, homework completion rates were posted outside of several classrooms. Notably, during periods covered by the charts, the rate did not drop below 90 percent. In addition, observed teachers often talked about what “great writers” or “great readers” do. One class had a wall recognizing students who scored above 80 percent on a practice state test.

Among teachers there is an understanding that learning is a public practice and the school operates with an open door policy, encouraging and, at times, requiring teachers to observe one another and give feedback to hone their craft. Reflecting this belief, one teacher said, the “motto here is you are not a classroom teacher, you are a school teacher.”

School leaders conduct regular observations, though the level of support varied with significant resources dedicated to novice teachers. A number of individuals on staff provide teachers with ongoing support including the principal, the dean of students, a resident leadership fellow and a part-time staff developer. School leaders reported the use of targeted supports to meet the observed needs of teachers. To accomplish this level of individualization of support, the school leadership team meets to determine priorities and then delegates responsibility for each area to a point person. In general, school leaders are well aware of individual teacher strengths and areas needing improvement and have provided targeted support to meet individual needs in the form of coaching and additional professional development.

Teachers reported being supported in a variety of ways, including regular observation and feedback cycles, lesson plan development support, assessment analysis support, videotaped observation and self reflection protocols, modeling and real-time coaching. Feedback was provided in written and oral format and observations were often followed by face-to-face debrief discussions. Teachers reported that much of the feedback received is rooted in the Taxonomy of Effective Teaching Practices, a document distributed by the school’s management organization, Uncommon Schools, which outlines and provides examples of strategies employed by successful teachers. According to teachers, the taxonomy allows for more focused discussions as it provides a common language for the discussion.

Teacher observations are tracked by school leaders in table format and updated regularly. At the time of the visit, the log indicated that all teachers had been observed between four and thirteen times, with an average of around eight observations per teacher. In general, teachers were satisfied with the support they were given and reported that the help had facilitated their improvement as teachers. One teacher was very thankful for support received around lesson planning. However, veteran teachers did report receiving more frequent observation and feedback during previous years; one said that this year, “feedback has been greatly reduced” and has focused more on management as opposed to instructional methodology or content. School leaders acknowledged a deliberate emphasis on the development of teachers’ classroom culture and management skills. In line with this priority, the school’s staff developer has targeted mainly teachers who are new to the school and who have struggled with classroom management.

The school has a process for conducting mid-year teacher evaluations, though not all teachers had been evaluated at the time of the visit. The mid-year review process is intended to provide both teachers and school leaders with a detailed summary of performance during the current school year. In the review process, teachers complete and submit a self-reflection form, assigning themselves a score from 1 through 4 in a number of competencies related to the various functions of their position. Over the course of the subsequent two weeks, the principal and other leadership team members observe the teacher. The principal then reviews the form and, in collaboration with the school’s staff

developer and other leadership team members, teachers are assigned ratings using the same scale in the same categories. A narrative commentary is also completed. After receiving the results of the evaluation, teachers reported having a 90 minute meeting with the principal to discuss particular strengths and areas for growth and to develop action plans. At the time of the visit, not all teachers had been evaluated nor advised of their status in the process. School leaders indicated that two teachers, currently under consideration for additional leadership responsibilities at the school, had not yet been evaluated but that a plan was in place to complete the evaluations before the end of the school year.

Instructional leaders adequately monitor and evaluate the academic program. Throughout interviews of teachers and school leaders, observers noted the deep use of data to inform overall school policies and practices and to drive improvement. Teachers and school leaders paid close attention to trends and patterns in available data and modified their practices accordingly. For example, based on interim assessment data as well as teacher input, the school has begun to supplement the Lucy Calkins Writers Workshop program to provide for more structured instruction in grammar and writing conventions and address particular student skill deficits. The use of performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's interventions was particularly well documented in the school's 2007-08 Annual Report, where achievement levels of those students not needing intervention and those receiving intervention supports were profiled. School leaders also regularly request feedback from teachers in brief weekly surveys and address relevant issues during staff meetings or in person as needed. For example, after-school tutoring sessions were cut back on this year in response to teacher feedback regarding the additional burden they placed on teachers, and additional in-school time was structured to meet students' needs.

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

Through regular and systematic interventions based on a variety of student achievement data, the school provides demonstrably effective supports to students who struggle academically. The school addresses student needs through a variety of in-class and pull-out interventions, including individualized academic and behavior plans, after-school and Saturday tutorials, targeted summer school remediation, small group instruction, ongoing parent collaboration, as well as both in-class and pull-out support services. Interviewed classroom teachers were knowledgeable about individual students needs and the interventions provided to meet them.

In addition to an extended day program, Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant provides after-school tutoring two days a week from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. for students in a small group setting. Teachers reported selecting students for this tutoring based on shared skill deficits in order to provide targeted small group remediation. In addition, for a portion of the year, select 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students attended the school's Saturday school program, referred to as Operation SMART, which provided individualized test prep for state exams. Summer school attendance is mandatory for students deemed to be in need of additional academic support.

The school uses a three-tiered response to intervention (RTI) system to identify and provide services to students with disabilities as well as students who would benefit from additional academic support. The student support team (SST), composed of the learning specialist, learning support coordinator, social worker and dean of students, meets with teachers from each grade level once every four to five weeks to discuss student performance and identify those who may be in need of additional support or intervention services.

Prior to these meetings, the SST, along with school leadership, use assessment data to identify students in need of additional support. The learning support coordinator reported that students who score in the bottom quintile on the DIBELS are identified as potentially at-risk. During the meetings with teachers from each grade level, participants discuss the performance of individual students and use a structured problem-solving protocol to develop action plans and identify strategies for implementation.

Monitored students who demonstrate below average progress between administrations of the DIBELS and interim assessments are identified to receive tier-one interventions, which take place in the classroom and are implemented by classroom teachers. For students who have not demonstrated sufficient progress, tier-two interventions are provided through additional pull-out remediation as well as supplemental instruction. Students deemed to be in need of more intensive tier-three interventions are considered for referral to the local committee on special education.

The school's learning support coordinator and learning support specialist reported using the Stern Structural arithmetic program and the Wilson Foundations program, as well as Lindamood-Bell's Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Learning and the reciprocal teaching method during small group interventions. Additional resources have been created by the learning support coordinator to support students with deeper needs.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant teachers and staff described a strong school-wide commitment to providing all students with the supports they needed to achieve at high levels. To hold teachers and staff members accountable for this goal, reports detailing the performance of students receiving intervention services in comparison to those who do not receive them are regularly prepared and discussed by staff members. According to the school's 2007-08 Annual Report and spreadsheets presented by the school's learning support coordinator, the gap between these two groups of students had been closed in the previous year and was nearly closed at the time of the visit. In addition, classroom teachers and SST members reported that, based on progress, many students had placed out of the intervention groups throughout the school year.

At the time of the visit, all interventions provided by the school's support coordinator and learning support specialist took place during pull-out sessions. However, the school's learning support coordinator reported that they are interested in exploring the possibility of including push-in support services as well. To meet the needs of the growing student population, the school plans to add another learning specialist next year to provide intervention services.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant serves a small population of English language learners, with only one student qualifying for services in the current year and all others having exited from the program after passing the NYSESLAT exam. The currently enrolled student was reported to receive additional reading support services provided by classroom and intervention teachers.

At Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant, teachers are provided with adequate training to help them meet the needs of at-risk students and teachers reported high satisfaction with the school's student support team staff and their overall approach to supporting at-risk students. Teachers were familiar with and involved in the creation and implementation of student-specific intervention plans and felt supported in their work with at-risk students. In addition to performing bi-annual audits of the school's special education records and services, Uncommon Schools' director of special education serves as a resource and mentor for the school's learning support coordinator.

During the summer, the SST led a training session that gave an overview of the services available for students with special needs. Teachers were trained in the school's RTI model, and expectations for teacher involvement in the process were set. The SST holds weekly drop-in office hours for teachers in need of additional support in modifying instruction to meet the needs of all students. The school's learning support coordinator reported holding informal 15-minute mini-workshops on a variety of topics based on teacher needs and interest.

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

A safe and orderly environment has been established throughout the school building. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant operates with extremely high standards of conduct, and adults consistently hold students accountable for their behavior and insist that behavioral expectations are met. Students are referred to as "teammates" and "scholars," and students and teachers were observed speaking in calm, respectful tones when addressing each other. The school climate was positive and supportive of learning at high levels, both within and outside classrooms.

Observed teachers employed classroom management strategies that establish an environment where learning is clearly valued and evident. Low level misbehavior is not tolerated. According to one teacher, teachers at Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant see classroom management as a means to "facilitate learning" and create an atmosphere that values and incentivizes academic focus. Teachers integrate strong classroom management practices into academic lessons and maximize time on task. For example, students used silent hand signals to indicate agreement or disagreement, and during pair/share activities, students spoke to each other earnestly. Teachers used ample praise and positive reinforcement to encourage students to continue desired behaviors or to showcase particularly exceptional student behavior. Teachers gave clear directions and students followed them. For example, prior to independent work time, a teacher reviewed the rules about working on the rug but not sitting close to each other. When students went to the rug, they sat down peacefully and were mindful of their neighbors' personal space. Classroom walls are decorated with teacher-made posters to illustrate expected behaviors and routines as well as motivational phrases and sayings.

The school has an effective discipline system in place and uses a variety of systems and tools to manage and reinforce student behavior. Teachers reported that the school's strong culture, reinforced by structure and routine, eliminated antecedent behaviors and prevented misbehavior from occurring. One staff member said that "the foundation for rigorous intellectual work is rigorous behavioral expectations." When misbehavior does take place, teachers use a behavior chart system that tracks student behavior on a common scale. Data on student behavior, collected via this system, are sent home to parents daily. The dean of students handles more serious behavioral infractions and relies upon regular and frequent parent communication to ameliorate their impact on instruction and student learning.

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

The school has dedicated substantial resources to professional development, particularly to meet the needs of novice teachers. All new and returning teachers attended a three and a half week summer professional development and training session prior to the start of the current school year. Workshops and trainings led by school leaders, teachers and other Uncommon Schools network staff included sessions on planning using the school's curricular materials, best practices in data-driven instruction and the incorporation of joy into lessons, among other topics. Returning teachers were especially satisfied with trainings designed to set expectations around the co-teacher relationship, as

this type of training had not been done in the past and teachers had felt a need for it during the previous school year. In addition, sessions on school culture, discipline and procedures geared towards teachers who were new to the school or profession were presented.

According to teachers and school leaders, the Taxonomy of Effective Teaching Practices distributed by Uncommon Schools is used as a guide and resource for the development and design of professional development activities. School leaders reported using the taxonomy's video clip database as a model of particularly effective teaching strategies for teachers in need of additional support and guidance. In addition, teachers reported that the taxonomy provided a common language when discussing elements of teaching.

The school encourages peer observation, both in person and through the use of video. Select teachers reported having visited and observed classes at North Star Academy, an elementary school in the Uncommon Schools network located in New Jersey.

On Fridays, students are dismissed early and teachers remain at the school for a variety of whole group and team meetings. According to teachers, grade teams meet during these Friday sessions to look at assessments and results, plan instruction and share effective practices. In addition, inquiry groups meet monthly and use Critical Friends discussion protocols to come up with solutions and action steps for questions and issues brought to the group by fellow teachers. The School Support Team follows a rotating schedule to meet with teachers from each grade level about specific student academic and behavioral challenges.

In addition to in-house professional development, the school has provided for select teachers to attend outside workshops and courses. For example, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher attended the Teachers College Summer Institute for the Teaching of Writing, and more experienced teachers had the opportunity to attend the Master Teacher Retreat sponsored by Uncommon Schools. Teachers who attended this event were expected to provide turnkey workshops for other teachers in the school using the skills they learned. Uncommon Schools' Teacher U program provides training for teachers who are new to the profession.

The school's co-director for instruction, dean of students, part-time staff developer and resident leadership fellow provided targeted coaching, modeling, observation and feedback, as well as lesson planning and data analysis support. For example, the co-director for instruction recently developed a new video self-reflection tool used to start conversations with the kindergarten team around current instructional practices. The school's resident leadership fellow led several workshops on the development of Core Knowledge trainings for the school's early elementary teachers and modeled lessons which highlighted the importance of urgency in the classroom. The school's staff developer reported conducting both pop-in and scheduled observations of select teachers and providing feedback on areas for improvement. School leaders reported the use of strategic improvement plans to target individual teachers' weaknesses.

While overall, interviewed teachers reported feeling supported in their development and were satisfied with the level and type of guidance they received, it was not evident that the school was meeting the needs of all teachers in all subject areas. Some teachers reported a need for more content and grade-level specific professional development activities, particularly with regard to the school's reading comprehension program and the writing curriculum. Although many teachers reported feeling confident about planning for and delivering scripted lessons, some said that they were not as confident in subjects where the plans were less definite. Also, some teachers were unaware of

additional resources available to support their writing instruction, specifically the Teachers College Units of Study books on which school-developed writing lessons were based.

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

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant has remained faithful to its mission. All stakeholders at the school, including teachers, school leaders and board members, were familiar with and expressed commitment to the school's mission of preparing students to enter into, excel within and graduate from college by providing them with the academic skills, background knowledge and character traits required to achieve at the highest levels.

#### *Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)*

Monthly phone calls home from teachers, frequent parent teacher conferences, report cards, the school newsletter and school events keep parents and families apprised of and engaged in their children's progress. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant's Families For Achievement meetings focus on various aspects of the curriculum, such as literacy, mathematics and community service, and give families the opportunity to better understand what skills their children are learning each day.

In its 2007-08 Annual Report to the State Education Department, the school reported a very low 4.7 percent student attrition rate. In addition, 35 percent of families responded to the 2007-08 Learning Environment Survey, which is administered by the New York City Department of Education and measures Academic Expectations, Communication and Engagement. While the response rate is too low to provide accurate information about overall parent satisfaction, 99 percent of respondents rated themselves as being satisfied or very satisfied with the school. On the same survey, in the Safety and Respect category, 100 percent of the families surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their children were safe at the school.

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

The day-to-day operations of Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant are effectively managed. The school has recently elevated the established Operations Director role at the school to the co-director level. The co-director for operations and finance is responsible for much of the back office support and external relations work at the school, as well as communication with the school's management company. Her role is intended to reduce the administrative burden on the school leader and allow him to spend more time focusing on instructional leadership. Teachers reported that school leaders anticipated their needs and provided abundant resources to meet them.

This year, the co-director for operations has spent a great deal of time coordinating and managing the planned ten block move from the school's current private space into a public school building operated by the Department of Education, which is scheduled to take place this summer. Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant will share the building with other public schools. As the school plans to serve kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in the coming year, the existing facility is no longer large enough to accommodate the expected level of enrollment.

The school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability. In general, teachers knew the appropriate people to whom they should turn for various supports or requests. The school is beginning to define mid-tier leadership, though these roles are not yet fully defined. Grade level and content area leader positions have been created, although not all teachers were clear about

the responsibilities involved in each position as they vary from grade to grade and from subject to subject.

The school has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel. Though moderate teacher turnover was reported at the end of the previous year, the school expects the staff to remain relatively stable from this year to the next. However, as the school plans to add a 4<sup>th</sup> grade and has plans to promote several high-performing teachers to leadership positions outside of the classroom, school leaders are prepared for an influx of new teachers.

Uncommon Schools provides Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant with significant support in recruiting and hiring quality teachers. Through a partnership with Teach for America, along with extensive local and national outreach, the school has received an average of over 100 applications for each open teaching position. School leaders reported that this year the school plans to rely less on Teach for America as a source for new teachers than it has in the past as it seeks to broaden the diversity of its teaching staff; however, first year Teach for America corps members will continue to be placed in the school.

Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant has maintained adequate enrollment and an adequate waitlist each year. According to Institute records, the school's 2008-09 enrollment was 248 students.

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

The school's board of trustees is clearly focused on student achievement and possesses a wide variety of skill sets with which they competently govern the school. During bi-monthly meetings, board members receive regular updates regarding school performance from the co-director of instruction as well as the co-director of operations and finance. The board's finance, governance, program and development committees hold conference calls between bi-monthly meetings to discuss relevant issues and report out at whole board meetings.

Board members reported that "student performance is our central goal" and that they see their job as ensuring that the school delivers promised results to the families and students it serves. Board members are made aware of student performance trends and patterns via monthly data dashboards, and they use these data to inform the decision making process. Board members also reported that they pay particular attention to measures of cohort growth as it tracks student progress and the impact of the school's educational program over time.

The board has engaged in an annual self-evaluation; however, it is in the process of revamping the tool used to measure the skills of specific board members, the board's success in achieving desired outcomes, and the degree to which the board is aligned with the overall goals of the school.

The board has an annual memorandum of understanding with Uncommon Schools, which provides the school with significant back office support around finances, business development, communications and guidance with regard to legal and compliance related issues.

The management company also provides the school with support in identifying, recruiting and selecting teachers for the school. Through a partnership with Teacher U, Uncommon Schools provides the school with a teacher training and certification program. In addition to support in hiring teachers, Uncommon Schools also provides support in locating and training secondary school leaders. This year, the school hosted an Uncommon Schools Hollyhock Resident Leadership Fellow

who plans to open another Uncommon School in the fall. The school expects future school leaders in the Leadership Prep network to complete similar residencies in the future.

Uncommon Schools also provides Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant with a managing director, who serves as the co-directors' supervisor and provides mentoring and coaching support for both leaders. He is also responsible for conducting the school leaders' evaluation process. While the managing director heads up the evaluation process, the board of trustees serves as the final evaluator and reserves the right to add to or modify the evaluations produced. At the time of the visit, the board had clear ideas about each co-directors' strengths and areas identified for continued improvement.

As an employee of Uncommon Schools and a board member, the managing director reported recusing himself from board meetings as needed to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant board has instituted a formal review of the services rendered by its charter management organization. As part of that review process, Uncommon Schools completes a self-evaluation describing the services it has provided to support the school and their perceived effectiveness. The board reviews the self-evaluation and makes additions as needed. The final document is discussed with the managing director and other Uncommon Schools leaders.

Overall, Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant board members were extremely satisfied with the services provided by Uncommon Schools, particularly with regard to the leadership coaching and mentoring services provided by the managing director and the support in fundraising and teacher recruitment. Additionally, board members reported that Uncommon Schools graciously accepts constructive feedback and uses it to improve the services it provides.

School building and facility issues continue to be a top concern of the board. With the planned move from a privately leased space into a shared Department of Education facility in the fall, the board expects to be in a stronger position financially but has begun to anticipate and plan for other challenges that may arise as a result of the shared space arrangement.

As the Leadership Prep network plans to include a new school in the fall, the board of trustees expects to grow in size accordingly. The board has planned for the expansion process and will add additional members to accommodate non-overlapping program committees for each of the schools. For the finance, development, and governance committees, which deal with very similar issues for each school, committee membership will overlap.

### **Conduct of the Visit**

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the School Evaluation Visit at Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant Charter School on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

**Kevin Flynn (Team Leader)** is an Accountability Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He is responsible for providing technical support related to school accountability plans, as well as the reporting and analysis of individual school performance. Prior to joining the Institute in November 2008, Mr. Flynn served as the Chair of the Science Department at KIPP 3D Academy Charter School in Houston, TX, where he authored curriculum, instructed 7th and 8th grade students, coached peers, and managed the Saturday School program. Prior to his service at KIPP 3D Academy, Mr. Flynn served as a science teacher via Teach For America at the John



Marshall Middle School, also in Houston. A recipient of the school's Excellence in Teaching Award, his responsibilities included curriculum development and instruction for at-risk students as well as English Language Learners. Mr. Flynn received his Master's degree in Education, with a concentration in Policy, Organization and Leadership Studies, from Stanford University and his Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from Cornell University.

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

**Hillary Johnson, Ph.D. (External Consultant)** is an independent educational consultant with 18 years experience as a teacher, staff developer and researcher. She has conducted over 25 school inspections with the Charter Schools Institute, primarily as a consulting writer. Past projects include providing professional development in reading and writing instruction, analyzing the alignment between standards and curriculum, and designing video-based professional development to support principals in developing instructional monitoring skills. She began her career as a Spanish bilingual teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher in Oakland CA. Subsequently, she served as a Literacy Content Coach and Whole School Change Coach to several Boston Public Schools. Dr. Johnson earned her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, her M.Ed. from Harvard University and her Doctorate of Education from Harvard University with a concentration through its Urban Superintendents Program.

**Kristina Berger (External Consultant)** is National Director, Community Programs at New Leaders for New Schools. In this capacity, she works across the New Leaders organization to build structures and practices that allow New Leaders principals - who are leading schools in ten urban school districts/regions across the U.S. - to stay connected to one another as a community of practice, engaging in active learning and mutual support and leading schools that prove that all children, everywhere, can achieve at high levels. She has held two previous roles at New Leaders: National Director of Curriculum (in this role, she was responsible for developing and implementing New Leaders year-long training program for aspiring principals) and National Summit Director (responsible for all aspects of a May 2007 gathering of 400+ members of the New Leaders community.) Kristina has also held senior management roles at Computers for Youth, the national office of the "I Have a Dream" Foundation, and New York Cares. Throughout her career, she has worked closely with public school leaders and with a wide range of public- and private-sector individuals to create and implement high-value programs for public schools. She is the co-author of a book on the early days of the charter school movement, and conducted extensive research on early school choice efforts in Minnesota and beyond. Kristina holds BA degrees in History and Political Science from Northwestern University and a MA in Sociology of Schools/Education Policy from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Charter Schools and the State University of New York**

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 (“the Act”) called for the creation of tuition-free public schools that would operate independently and autonomously of local school districts, schools by design committed to improving student achievement for all students, particularly those at-risk of academic failure.

The Act specifies that civic leaders, community groups, educators and/or parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities may apply to one of three chartering entities in the state to open a new charter school: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the “State University Trustees”), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor). Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) was established by the State University Trustees to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under the Act, including reviewing applications to establish charter schools as well as the review of renewal applications for those schools (as detailed more fully below, an initial charter is granted for a period of five years only). In each case, the Institute makes recommendations to the State University Trustees. In addition the Institute is charged with providing ongoing oversight of SUNY authorized charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools in every respect. They are open to all children, non-sectarian in their programs and funded with public tax dollars. Unlike district operated schools, which are run by a board of education, each public charter school is governed by an independent board of trustees, which is directly responsible for school performance. While independent, public charter schools and their boards, like traditional public schools and school boards, are subject to oversight and monitoring. Additionally, all public charter schools in New York State are jointly subject to inspection and oversight by the State Education Department (SED) on behalf of the Board of Regents. As such, charter schools, though free from many mandates, are more accountable to the public than district-run schools.

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

### **The Renewal Cycle and the Timing of School Inspection Visits**

Because some schools take planning years before opening (during which time their five-year charter continues to run as if they had opened) and/or receive renewal charter terms of less than five years, the number of years that a school has been in operation is not always co-terminus with the number of



years that a school has provided instruction. Thus for example, a school that is in its seventh year of operation may be in its fifth year of instruction and facing initial renewal, having previously received a short-term planning year renewal for a period of time equivalent to the number of planning years the school took. It will therefore receive a renewal visit, whereas another school that did not take any planning years and was renewed for five years would be in the second year of its second five-year charter. This school would therefore not receive a renewal visit but rather an evaluation visit and report, which all schools in that position receive. As such, each of the Institute’s evaluation reports contains a chart indicating the years the school has been in operation, the year of its present charter period, when it has been renewed and for how long, and the feedback that has been previously issued to the school.

In evaluating schools at renewal and on a regular and ongoing basis, 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 (“the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks”). How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit as well as whether the school is in its initial renewal cycle (the first five years) or, having been renewed one or more times, in subsequent renewal cycles.

In particular, the Institute uses a subset of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1.B—1.H) 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), the focus on these academic benchmarks is important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students’ performance on standardized tests (especially the state’s 3<sup>rd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade testing program and Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret. The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on *how* the school is doing, but also *why* it is succeeding or failing.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, and particularly at the time of the school’s initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators (as defined by Renewal Benchmark 1A, the school’s progress in meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals) take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools must demonstrate results or face non-renewal. However, while subsequent renewal decisions are based almost solely by the school’s progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals during the charter period, the Institute continues to use the academic benchmarks in its evaluation of charter schools. The reason for this is that it can give the school, parents, and other stakeholders information not only on how the school is doing but perhaps the reasons for its lack of performance (if such is the case).

### **Keeping This Report in Context**

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face a variety of challenges as they mature, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. The State

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<sup>4</sup> More often, of course, schools do not succeed or fail so much as parts of the highly complex organization are working well and parts are not.

University Trustees and the Institute recognize the difference between the challenges of starting-up a school and those involved in sustaining its viability and effectiveness over the long-term, as well as the differences in the richness of student assessment data available for a school which has recently opened compared to a school which has been in operation for an extended time. In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;
- establishing operational and communication patterns with the governing school board of trustees, as well as communication patterns with staff, parents and the community;
- setting up sound fiscal processes and procedures;
- establishing the school in often less-than-ideal facilities, without ready access to facilities funding mechanisms available to district administered public schools;
- creating an environment with strong instructional leadership where teachers receive timely professional development to address changing student needs;
- ensuring that all staff are familiar with and consistently use an effective system for behavior management; and
- retaining qualified staff and minimizing the frequency and rate of any staff turnover by understanding the reason for it, and providing replacement staff with an orientation to the school and its program, as well as the necessary professional development.

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

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

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

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

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