



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School

School Evaluation Report 2009-2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (“SUNY Trustees”), jointly with the New York State Board of Regents, are required by law to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the SUNY Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The SUNY Trustees, however, consistent with the goals of the 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 SUNY authorized charter schools. By providing this oversight, the SUNY 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 SUNY Trustees are better informed in making a decision on whether a school’s charter should be renewed. In addition, a school will have a far better sense of where they stand in the eyes of its authorizer.

This annual School Evaluation Report includes three primary components. The first section, titled Executive Summary of School Evaluation Visit, provides the primary conclusions of the evaluation team from current visit to the school. The second section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as summary historical information regarding the life of the school. Finally, a third section, entitled School Evaluation Visit, presents the analysis of evidence collected during the visit. A summary of conclusions from previous school evaluations is also provided as background and context for the current evaluation.

Because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, this Evaluation Report does not contain a single rating or comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance the school’s prospects for renewal. It does, however, summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement 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

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (BECS) is one of three SUNY authorized charter schools that partner with the for-profit educational management organization, National Heritage Academic (NHA). The school was in its seventh year of operation at the time of the evaluation visit.

Based on an analysis of evidence from this evaluation visit, BECS is working to address a number of challenges while making progress toward achieving its mission and meeting the SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks. Some of the more salient conclusions in the report include the following:

Academic Success

Areas of Strengths:

Assessment is an overall area of strength for the school, as school leaders and teachers follow clear policies and procedures in using student performance data to improve instructional effectiveness.

BECS has a comprehensive and organized curriculum framework, and generally adequate instructional materials. Teachers by and large implement purposeful lessons designed to help students meet the lesson objectives.

The school leadership and teachers demonstrate high expectations for student achievement. Instructional leaders provide teachers with ongoing support and conduct regular formal evaluations, which are used to hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement.

BECS is demonstrably effective in helping at-risk students succeed academically, with clear identification procedures and sufficient interventions to meet their needs. The school also monitors the progress and success of these students to ensure the program's continued effectiveness.

Areas for Growth:

In the past, teachers have had a large amount of discretion over what to teach and when to teach it; at the time of the visit the school was developing new systems to guide teachers' instructional planning.

Adequate instruction was evident in many classes during the Institute's visit, but many classes were hampered by a lack of urgency and rigor. Instruction was generally grade-appropriate but the level of cognitive engagement varied and most instruction did not promote higher order thinking or problem solving skills. In addition, there was limited differentiation within general education classrooms and teachers had not received sufficient support on meeting the needs of all students within their classrooms.

During the time of the team's visit, classroom management issues in many rooms interfered with the school's ability to promote a culture of learning and scholarship. While teachers were allowed to develop their own classroom-based management systems, many teachers lacked the skills to do so effectively.

Some teachers expressed a lack of clarity around expectations for their performance and expressed a desire for more regular observations and feedback on their instruction. Other teachers did not find the evaluations useful due to their generality and did not fully understand the basis for the ratings. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire for professional development that was more targeted and directly applicable to their classroom

practice.

Organizational Capacity

Areas of Strengths:

Organizationally, BECS is adhering to its mission, generating strong parent support and maintaining sufficient student enrollment.

School leaders and the school's board and management company adequately monitor the school's programs and makes necessary changes, as exemplified by several recent programmatic changes that were in progress at the time of the evaluation visit.

The school's board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and provide oversight to the total academic program.

Areas for Growth:

Inspectors noted some lack of clarity on the roles of the assistant principals and principal, most notably in regard to formal evaluations.

While the school's facility is generally adequate, some issues with the building appear to hamper the academic program.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	January 29, 2002
Date Initial Charter Approved by: Board of Regents	March 19, 2002
School Opening Date	September, 2003

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2003-04	505 Fulton St. Brooklyn, NY	All	New York City CSD 18
2004-05 through present	856 Quincy St. Brooklyn, NY	All	New York City CSD 16

Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current Partner	National Heritage Academies	Education Management Organization	2001-present

Renewal

Type of Renewal	Date*
Short Term Planning Year Renewal	January 11, 2007
Initial Full-Term Renewal	March 11, 2008

*Approved by SUNY Board of Trustees

Current Mission Statement

Working in partnership with parents and community, the Brooklyn Excelsior Chart School mission is to become one of the finest K-8 schools in the country. We offer a challenging, character-based education through a rigorous curriculum with high academic and social expectations. Our school prioritizes the academic program and instructional time so each student reads, computes, and writes at or above grade level. We expect our students to master basic skills and realize their full potential in preparation for higher education and adulthood.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide each student with a program of study characterized by excellent instruction, and a strong, balanced core curriculum aligned with New York State's learning standards;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage parental and staff involvement through parent-teacher committees,
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement a code of conduct designed to provide students with a safe, and orderly school environment in which learning can take place without disruption; and,
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on character development of all students by emphasizing a different character quality each month.

School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2003-04	240	220	201	K-5	K-4	180
2004-05	480	480	492	K-6	K-5	182
2005-06	555	555	575	K-7	K-6	182
2006-07	630	630	648	K-8	K-7	182
2007-08	740		692	K-8	K-8	182
2008-09	704		714	K-8	K-8	182
2009-10	704		726	K-8	K-8	180

Student Demographics

	2006-07 ²		2007-08 ³		2008-09 ⁴	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 16 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 16 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 16 Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Black or African American	96%	86%	96%	85%	94%	84%
Hispanic	4%	11%	4%	12%	5%	13%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
White	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Multiracial	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Special Populations						
Students with Disabilities ⁵						
Limited English Proficient	0%	3%	0%	3%	0%	3%
Free/Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	78%	70%	87%	70%	91%	74%
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	11%	7%	6%	6%	4%	6%

¹ Source: SUNY Charter School Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

² Source: 2006-07 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

³ Source: 2007-08 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

⁴ Source: 2008-09 School Report Cards, New York State Education Department.

⁵ New York State Education Department does not report special education data

Current Board of Trustees⁶

Board Member Name	Term Expires	Position/Committees
Corey Martin	June 2013	Chair
Kay Madati	June 2012	Trustee
Erika Humphrey	June 2011	Secretary
Carol Schulhof	June 2013	Trustee
Omar Wasow	June 2011	Trustee
Stephanie Cuba	June 2013	Trustee

School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2003-04 - 2004-05	Alan Handel, Principal
2005-06 (fall to spring)	Deborah Coker, Principal
2005-06 - 2006-07 (spring to fall)	Irwin Kurz, Interim Principal
2006-07 - 2009-10	Thomas G. DeMarco, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2003-04	First-Year Visit	Institute	May 11, 2004
2004-05	Second-Year Visit	Institute	April 21, 2005
2005-06	Third-Year Visit	External	May 9-12, 2006
2007-08	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	October 30 - Nov.1, 2007
2009-10	Seventh-Year Visit	Institute	May 18-19, 2010

⁶ Source: Institute Board Records.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Background

All Institute evaluations of SUNY authorized charter schools are conducted through the lens of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks outline the expectations of the SUNY Trustees for the academic success of the school, including teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), and the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as governance and fiscal stability. The SUNY Charter Renewal benchmarks are the foundation of the Institute's oversight process to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

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

This section of the School Evaluation Report begins with a summary of the observations made and the conclusions drawn during 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 the school has faced. Similarly, this information provides the reader with insight into the Institute's inspection 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 Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted a renewal visit to Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School on October 30-November 1, 2007. The evaluation team observed classrooms; interviewed administrators, board members and teachers; and reviewed student work and other documents. As a result of the evaluation visit, a report was provided to the school's board of trustees outlining the major conclusions from the visit; these conclusions are briefly summarized below.

At the conclusion of the 2007 visit to Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (BECS), the school was granted a full-term renewal of five years. At the time of this visit, the school regularly administered a wide variety of standardized and school developed assessments. The assessments were used to evaluate progress against Accountability Plan goals, to identify students at-risk of academic failure, and to evaluate and modify instructional content in English language arts and mathematics. The school leadership had communicated results to the school's board of trustees and its teaching staff, as well as to parents regarding their child's individual performance.

At the time of the renewal visit BECS defined its curriculum based on commercial materials using New York State standards as a constant reference point. The school had at the time of the visit realized that the commercial materials required adaptation for alignment with state standards and had begun to make progress modifying pre-packaged materials to bring them closer in alignment with State performance standards.

The school's instructional leadership was led by an effective principal. The school had clearly defined success as achieving the school's Accountability Plan goals and made that a priority. The administration had taken consistent action directed at achieving Accountability Plan goals and instructional staff had internalized these priorities. The school's administrative team at the time had mixed capacity, and teachers relied on informal avenues for instructional support and development.

During the inspection team's two-day visit, there was evidence of high-quality instruction at almost every grade level. The school had recently made strides in promoting strategies that facilitate differentiated instruction, especially in the elementary grades. However, instruction in a number of classes showed fundamental weaknesses in classroom management or organizational detail, and student engagement in those classrooms was correspondingly low.

BECS devoted substantial resources to helping students who were struggling academically, based on both assessment data and teacher recommendation. Interventions offered included in-class paraprofessional support, informal support from classroom teachers during breaks, and voluntary after-school, Saturday and summer school programs. Despite all of these interventions, the programs suffered from implementation challenges and weaknesses that were likely to limit their effectiveness.

BECS had invested significant resources, both staff and time, in professional development. However, despite providing this wide range of resources and opportunities, the school lacked a comprehensive and coherent strategy for professional development. Evidence collected at the time of the renewal visit revealed that professional development meetings did not consistently address the priorities identified by the leadership and staff.

At the time of the renewal visit, BECS was faithful to its mission as it had established a clear focus on core academics and was taking steps towards incorporating character development into its educational program. The school had also begun to make progress in generating parent participation and leadership, though with mixed results. Parents reported positive attitudes about the availability and responsiveness of teachers and administrators, how their children's progress is communicated to them, and the teachers' learning expectations for their children.

At the time of the renewal visit the BECS board of trustees understood the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth for it to provide effective oversight. The board had academic accountability as a permanent item on its meeting agenda, and had a performance dashboard provided by National Heritage Academies, the school's for-profit education management company, that was updated monthly. At the time of the visit, board members demonstrated a sound understanding of the board's role in overseeing student performance and demonstrated their ability to track progress towards meeting educational goals.

Current Evaluation Visit Benchmark Analysis and Evidence

Use of Assessment Data (Benchmark 1.B)

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (BECS) gathers assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school administers both standardized tests across the school as well as other assessments at teachers' discretion. BECS administers the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) computer-adaptive assessment and mock state tests, while teachers have discretion over the use of other assessments. The NWEA is administered three times per year in all grades to measure student progress. The NWEA is administered across the

national network of NHA schools, and is also used to monitor the relative performance of NHA managed schools. Grades 2-8 also take mock state exams five times per year in English language arts and mathematics to measure student growth and in the upper grades to serve as a predictor for performance on the state test. These exams are created by the school's instructional specialists based on State standards, past State exams, and the school's curriculum. Teachers also administer a variety of other exams in their classroom, either self-created or taken from the commercial curriculum programs used. The assistant principal for kindergarten through 2nd grade reported that the majority of teachers currently rely on the commercial exams, but are moving toward modifying assessments to better meet their students' needs. In the 3rd grade, which is beginning to use guided reading, teachers also administer running records and Reading A to Z assessments to assess reading levels.

Teachers also reported and were observed using a variety of informal assessment techniques. These included collected Do Nows that were used to assess if students had mastered material from the previous days' lessons, exit tickets, thumbs up/thumbs down whole class answering, and using whiteboards to see all students' answers at one time. Many teachers were also observed using a verbal check for understanding technique allowing all students to give answers. One teacher asked students if they understood the material but only let one student respond before moving on, limiting her ability to ensure understanding by all students.

BECS systematically collects and analyzes data from both the NWEA and mock state assessments. NWEA provides teachers with a detailed analysis about each student's performance after each test administration. These are broken down by item and by question type and teachers can use the online system to gain more information about the skills in which students are deficient. Each class has growth targets based on their starting level that administration reviews in measuring progress. Teachers are responsible for grading and analyzing the mock state exams, though they are provided with a template listing the skill tested to make item analysis easier. Teachers felt that this was a lot of work, but also that these results were extremely helpful to them in planning their instruction and monitoring student progress. Since the NWEA is aligned to the national NHA curriculum rather than state standards and the BECS scope and sequence, teachers felt it did not always accurately measure student learning, making the mock state exam results more useful.

Teachers at BECS grade writing assignments using rubrics but reported having received limited training on the use of these rubrics. When teachers were asked about norming the grading of writing assignments across the grade level, they indicated that they were unsure, with one teacher responding that "Everyone is different. Some teachers grade harder, some more easily. I think it's better to grade harder. They leave it up to the teacher's discretion." In two classes where student work was reviewed students consistently received "3" on essays (based on a 4 point scale) but with limited feedback on their writing. The comments provided did not reflect the rubric. Middle school English language arts teachers did report sharing work to norm their expectations; however, they did not always use rubrics to grade work but rather either left work ungraded or gave it a check with minimal written feedback.

Teachers and school leaders use results to meet students' needs, primarily through re-teaching and grouping students for interventions. Teachers reported looking at results from the NWEA, mock State tests and unit exams to identify topics for re-teaching and that they have the flexibility to deviate from the pacing guide to re-teach topics if assessment results show this is needed. Assessment results are also used to identify students for interventions provided by both the paraprofessionals and the instructional support teachers. Paraprofessional supports are more informal and thus based not only on formal assessments but also teacher observations. Some grades

have begun to implement guided reading where teachers use running record results to create groups. One 4th grade mathematics teacher grouped students homogenously based on NWEA and mock state test results to work on particular skills. One middle school teacher reported that the NWEA item analysis provided information about individual strengths and weaknesses that she used to create groups and that she also used center rotations to re-teach skills that were not mastered, although this was not observed. Assessment results were also used to create an accelerated class in the lower grades and to identify 8th grade students to take the New York State Regents' Exam in Algebra.

The school follows clear policies and procedures for the use of student performance data. Grade level teams along with their respective assistant principal meet prior to the year and determine grade weighting policies that will be used across the grade to determine progress report and report card grades, which take into consideration homework, projects, tests, and quizzes. Teachers also enter grades into the online gradebook, which makes student profiles available to parents to view online. Gradebook entries are then translated into a quarterly report card. All report cards, especially the comments, are reviewed by the principal and the assistant principals.

The school's promotional policy is explicitly detailed in the parent student handbook, and takes into consideration NWEA scores, state exams, classroom grades, and attendance. Promotion in doubt students are identified by teachers in January, with letters sent home after the second report card and parents coming in for a conference on next steps. Final promotional decisions are made by the principal after consulting with the classroom teacher and assistant principal. Retention rates are relatively low, especially in the lower grades, with 6-7 students retained after the 2008-09 school year, all of whom remained enrolled at BECS.

School leaders, as well as National Heritage Academies (NHA), the educational management organization the school contracts with, have identified grading policy as an area for improvement moving forward. The school plans to move from a 100 point grading scale to a 4 point scale using a performance rubric. This is an NHA-wide initiative and school leaders will be receiving additional training to turnkey to staff over the summer. One reason for this move is a concern about norming, and hope that as grade teams work together in developing the assessment and rubrics during this process that expectations will become more consistent.

Curriculum (Benchmark 1.C)

BECS has a comprehensive and organized curriculum framework, though it does not appear to be sufficiently detailed to guide teachers' instructional planning. The school provided the visit team with a curriculum framework that was reported to be used as a support resource rather than as curriculum plans themselves. The document notes "...it is intended to be a support resource to access for instructional purposes...in no way intended to be a course of study for students, not a required scope and sequence for teachers." It aligns NYS standards to NHA standards for all grades and subjects taught. Teachers have access to additional resources on the NHA website, which list out topics to be covered in each grade and subject, serving as a planning template.

In past years teachers had discretion over what to teach and when to teach it. Using standards and commercial programs, teachers created pacing guides during the summer for use throughout the year. Many teachers reported that they generally followed the commercial curriculums with some adjustments based on assessed student needs. However, this year, the school, in conjunction with NHA, has begun moving toward yearly curriculum plans that lay out objectives to be covered in each quarter. Teachers are expected to then use these to inform their planning going forward. Some

teachers reported using these, though many teachers reported developing monthly plans based on State standards and the commercial programs. Some teachers used the yearly and monthly plans to develop unit plans, while others did not use any unit-based organization.

BECS has adequate instructional materials aligned to its curriculum framework. All interviewed teachers reported that they had adequate materials with which to teach their curriculum. Observed classrooms had sufficient text, workbooks, and supplementary materials for all students. Some teachers also reported creating their own supplementary materials, particularly when a topic needs re-teaching. The instructional support teacher reported generally using the same materials being used during whole-class instruction, though sometimes using a lower grades' text to cover the same topics. Middle school English language arts is a primarily novel-based program, and the teacher selects these texts in collaboration with the other grade team members and the assistant principal.

As discussed above, BECS has recently implemented a new process for reviewing and revising curriculum and its effectiveness remains to be seen. This year, as directed by NHA, the yearly plan development process did not begin until October and teachers indicated that they felt they were not given sufficient time to maximize the process' effectiveness. The assistant principals acknowledged that there had not been full buy-in this year and that they hoped to improve the process moving forward. School leadership will be receiving additional training on curriculum development over the summer, which they plan to bring back to the whole staff for the upcoming school year. School leaders realized that for most teachers, these plans had not been viewed as living documents, but rather something required to be turned in. School leaders reported wanting to work with teachers on how to effectively use these plans going forward. Professional development sessions will also be devoted to how these plans line up with the implementation of curriculum and how they can best be revised to meet students' needs. Leadership also acknowledged that going forward they will have to devote more time to monitoring curriculum implementation, both in alignment with these new yearly plans as well as State and NHA standards.

Pedagogy (Benchmark 1.D)

During the inspection team's visit to BECS, adequate instruction was evident in many classes throughout the school. In some classes inspectors noted a lack of urgency and rigor. In most observed classes, teachers implemented purposeful lessons designed to help students meet the objectives. Notably, the quality of objectives varied across lessons. In observed middle school mathematics classes, objectives were purposeful, measurable, clear, and attainable; the lessons were purposefully designed to help students meet the objective, though there was no whole class check for understanding. In the early elementary grades teachers were observed starting each lesson with an "I can..." objective and discussing this with students. Other teachers discussed training on objectives, but their only takeaways were that each lesson can only have one objective and that objectives must be measurable. Objectives in some of these classes were vague, or non-academic, including "I can work cooperatively and remain on task in my group." Additionally, in many classes learning objectives were activities or tasks rather than knowledge or skills to be mastered, such as "I can write a one-paragraph description of my bedroom, including as many sensory details as possible."

There was no school-wide template or standard for lesson planning. Inspectors reviewed many poor quality lesson plans, with one teacher admitting that the quality of her plans depended on whether or not she knew she was going to be observed. Additionally, one teacher admitted that she does not design lesson plans for the rest of the class when doing guided reading with a small group. In one lesson with two objectives, one on a novel and one on grammar, there was no purposeful transition

between the activities and the grammar lesson did not directly address the objective. In another classroom, the lesson plan was not appropriate for the length of time, leaving most students talking or staring into space for much of the period.

While instruction during the team's visit was generally grade-appropriate, the level of cognitive engagement varied across classes. In one 3rd grade class students were generally not engaged in their activity resulting in only half of the students completing the task in the allotted time period; the activity was also not rigorous as it was primarily an exercise in cutting and pasting. In another English language arts class students were asked to make text-to-text connections that were too advanced for their skill set, thus leading to a lack of engagement. In one middle school English language arts class, the whole period was spent going round-robin around the room reviewing homonyms; students were not engaged in checking their work and only paid attention when their turn was nearing. There were also classes where the level of engagement was high; in one 4th grade mathematics class the teacher used thumbs up/thumbs down as a means to ensure that students were continuously engaged in the lesson. In middle school Spanish lessons students were highly engaged, with students sharing with their peers and learning from each other.

Inspectors observed that teachers often did the majority of thinking for students and their questioning strategies generally did not promote higher-order thinking or problem solving skills. Teachers' lesson plans listed three questions categorized as higher level, and mathematics teachers placed a corresponding Bloom's taxonomy level next to these questions, but they were often inaccurate, such as the question, "what is a rational number?" being labeled as analysis. In one guided reading lesson, the only questions asked during the reading were simple vocabulary questions, and at the end the question "what's the main idea?" was asked but there was no explanation or unpacking of student responses. One teacher asked students to explain the "why" behind their answers in an attempt to promote higher order thinking, but acceptable answers were not higher level.

In observed classrooms, teachers generally did not push students to explain their responses and many did not require responses to be 100 percent correct before moving on. For example, when students were asked to define the word "contract" and provide examples, many students gave one word answers that were incorrect or unclear, and the teacher then accepted the answer "conveyor belt" and moved on. In many instances, teachers would answer the more difficult questions themselves rather than letting the students work toward an appropriate response and would ask leading questions to ensure students got to the right answer. For example, when discussing the abolishment of slavery in Washington, DC the teacher asked the following series of questions: "Is Washington DC our nation's capital? Does it act as a symbol? If slavery is allowed in the city what does it say about our country?" The teacher accepted "bad" as a response and then summarized the point. In most classes, incomplete sentences were commonly accepted as answers.

While there was some observed use of small group instruction within classes, there was limited differentiation. The school has some small-group interventions for students who are struggling academically, which will be discussed in more detail in Benchmark 1.F (At-Risk Students). The use of small group instruction varied across classrooms with some teachers using primarily whole class instruction and others grouping students for the majority of lessons. Many teachers expressed interest in using more small-group instruction but felt that due to large class-sizes and management concerns they were not able to do so. In the majority of observed lessons that utilized small-group instruction, all students were doing the same activity. In a few classrooms, while groups were doing the same activity the teacher and paraprofessional offered additional support to the groups composed of struggling students. There were some notable exceptions, primarily in the middle school. The

middle school mathematics teacher differentiates her questioning by dividing students into homogenous groups for problem solving; each group has a number and there are numbered problems on the board which vary in level. This allows the work to be differentiated without calling attention to the struggling group. In one middle school social studies class student work packets were differentiated; students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) were provided with a packet of cloze notes with some of the blanks filled in while those of other students were blank for taking guided notes.

This lack of differentiation has been acknowledged by teachers and administrators. One way the school is working to change this is through the introduction of guided reading which, at the time of the inspection visit, was being piloted in the 3rd through 5th grade as an enrichment component of the curriculum, with some kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers participating on a voluntary basis. Teachers received some training this past year and will receive additional training. The school has purchased full guided reading sets for kindergarten through 5th grade, and is hoping to have teachers do more inter-visitations to learn about the program. Teachers in 3rd through 5th grade used running records and Reading A to Z assessments to group students, and will receive additional training in these assessments going forward.

Instructional Leadership (Benchmark 1.E)

BECS had adequate instructional leadership at the time of the visit, and was implementing new systems in an attempt to further improve in this area. Teachers receive instructional leadership from a variety of sources, including the principal, assistant principals, and instructional support staff, with the grade-level assistant principal serving as teachers' primary supervisors on day-to-day basis.

School leaders and teachers have high expectations for student achievement, exemplified in many ways. In the middle school, it is exemplified in the move toward offering Regents courses and a preparation course for admitting students to specialized high schools. In the lower grades these expectations are generally framed in terms of test performance. One teacher reported that, "every student should be on grade level, pass English language arts and mathematics." Another teacher reported that, "there's a large stress that we want to see good scores on tests and that the scores affect if you go to a good high school and college."

School leaders have established high expectations for teachers but teachers reported a lack of clarity around these expectations. The principal spoke about working with teachers to step outside their comfort zone and do more non-traditional teaching, including student discussion and small group work. The administration spoke of expecting teachers to go above and beyond expectations, including attendance, student performance, and being involved in school activities, with this serving as the primary criteria for bonus opportunities. Teachers, however, were unable to describe the criteria for the bonus system and some questioned the objectivity with which they were allocated.

Instructional leaders provide teachers with ongoing support, though some teachers expressed a desire for more regular in-depth observations and feedback on their instruction. This year the school moved to the "O3" protocol for instructional support, standing for one-on-one. According to this protocol, instructional leaders (assistant principals in this case) should visit classrooms more often but for shorter periods of time, visiting classrooms for 10-15 minutes on a daily bases to gain an understanding of the daily happenings. Then, these observations as well as any other issues are discussed during a weekly one-on-one check-in meeting. There is a format for these meetings and a corresponding template, allotting time for each party to raise issues and concerns. The assistant

principals felt that while it was still developing, this was a much better system than last year when it was more informal, as it allows them to build relationships with teachers and visit classrooms more regularly. Documents provided to the team included meeting notes from the assistant principals, though in one case only notes from early in the year were provided. Comments from interviewed teachers did not always support the claims of the assistant principals on the implementation of the O3 system. Some teachers reported that their assistant principal is not a strong presence in their classroom. Some teachers stated that there had not been an administrator in their classroom all year, while others said the assistant principal popped in once a week at most. They described the meetings as unplanned and unstructured, often just consisting of conversations around their personal lives. In other cases, the assistant principal is a constant presence in classrooms, and teachers found their assistant principal to be an extremely useful resource in all areas, both at weekly O3 meetings and whenever else they need support. All middle school teachers reported weekly O3 meetings that covered a variety of issues, including academic issues, behavior, student data, enrichment, lesson planning, and parents. This was corroborated in the notes provided. Some teachers expressed a desire for more extended observations versus the snapshots that are a part of the O3 model, and corresponding feedback on their instruction. School management planned to review all tools for evidence of implementation at the end of the school year.

Other instructional supports provided to teachers also varied by assistant principal. Some teachers reported receiving feedback on lesson plans from their assistant principal. Others reported modeled lessons, both at the teachers request and the assistant principal's initiative. The middle grade assistant principal also runs extra professional development sessions for his teachers when needed, such as around the guided reading initiative. Teachers also reported receiving some supports from the instructional support and instructional specialists on staff. This is generally informal through the provision of resources, assistance with planning, and advice on individual students.

Instructional leaders conduct regular evaluations. Formal evaluations are conducted twice per year for each teacher, both mid-year and end of year. These evaluation tools are provided to the school by NHA and are completed by the assistant principals in conjunction with the principal, who have received training on using the tools from NHA. The evaluations are based on cumulative evidence up to the date given rather than on a single formal observation, as had been done in the past. The mid-year evaluation does not provide space for feedback, but rather is a checklist across a variety of categories. Teachers are evaluated against school goals, including student performance, parent satisfaction, and contributions to the school.

Some teachers felt that the evaluations conducted this year were not sufficiently detailed to inform their instructional practice, expressing concerns about the criteria and evidence base. One teacher said that "it can't be accurate" based on how infrequently an administrator observes instruction, also saying that he doesn't know how they evaluate the categories since there is not a rubric. Additionally, one teacher reported that the informal feedback received was largely positive, but that this was not reflected in the formal evaluation. Teachers also expressed concern that the principal changed the assistant principal's evaluation at times given the rarity of him visiting classrooms. However, some teachers did appreciate that the administration sat down individually with teachers and went through an explanation of the evaluation.

Teachers at BECS are held accountable for quality instruction and student achievement. One way is the bonus system, where teachers are rewarded in varying amounts for outstanding performance. Additionally, the principal bases the percentage raise each year on a teachers' performance the past year. The school has let poor teachers go in the past, and plans to do so again this year. Struggling

teachers are given an intervention plan with multiple tiers of support, including increased observations, additional professional development, and modeled lessons.

At-Risk Students (Benchmark 1.F)

BECS is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically based upon student performance. They have clear procedures for identifying at-risk (special education, ELL, and academically struggling) students. Once identified, the school provides these students with sufficient interventions to meet their needs, although these supports were limited during whole-class instruction. Teachers at BECS are not provided with sufficient support to help them meet the needs of these students in the general education classroom.

The school uses clear procedures for identifying at-risk students. If a teacher suspects a student may have a disability there are a set of strategies for them to try for three weeks. If these do not work, a student is then referred to the Child Study Team (CST), composed of special education staff and school leadership, who suggest additional interventions for that student. If those do not work, the CST will refer the student to the Committee on Special Education for an evaluation. ELL students are identified using the home language survey and the Lab-R, coordinated by an instructional specialist. Students who are struggling academically are identified for interventions based on NWEA results at the beginning of the year, and more informally based on assessments and teacher observations throughout the year.

At-risk students at BECS are provided with sufficient interventions to meet their needs, although they receive limited supports within the general education classroom. Special education students receive Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETTS) from one of two teachers on staff depending on their grade. These teachers receive lesson plans from the general education teachers and modify them accordingly to meet their students' needs. In most situations they pull students to work on a particular subject when that subject is being taught and cover the same general material as the whole-class. At the time of the visit, related services are contracted to outside providers, though the school is looking to hire a full-time speech teacher for the upcoming year.

The school has a small ELL population and thus does not have a staff member designated to providing interventions to this group. Interventions are provided by the instruction specialist and paraprofessionals. There is a dedicated commercial curriculum the school has purchased that they use in working with these students.

Students who are struggling academically receive support from either an instructional support teacher or a paraprofessional. The instructional support teachers primarily work with small groups of students in a pull-out setting. In the lower grades, the teachers' subject focus varies depending on the time of year (i.e., more focus on social studies with 5th graders early on in the year in preparation for the social studies exam). In the upper grades, instructional support teachers are designated by subject and work only with students in that subject. The groups are flexible based on assessment results and teacher observations, though one teacher indicated that there is a core group she works with all year and other students rotate in and out to receive additional support in specific skills as needed. Paraprofessionals also provide academic supports to individual or small-groups of students, though this is more ad-hoc and only around a specific skill or lesson students did not master. Some teachers also run after-school tutoring programs to help struggling students. As discussed in the pedagogy section, most of the general education classroom instruction was whole-class and thus these out of

classroom interventions are the primary means by which academically struggling students receive assistance.

The school adequately monitors the progress of at-risk students. The special education coordinator accesses teachers' weekly progress reports and gradebook online. She also tracks IEP goals on a weekly basis, which she then uses to generate quarterly reports on each student's progress. The instructional support staff also participates in regular grade level or department meetings in order to discuss individual student progress. School leaders also regularly review the progress of at-risk students, and several students, both ELL and special education, have been decertified over the course of the school's history. NWEA results are disaggregated by disability, allowing intervention providers as well as classroom teachers and administrators to monitor their progress.

Despite these strong elements of BECS' program for at-risk students, teachers were not provided with sufficient support to help them meet the needs of at-risk students in the general education classroom. Teachers received one professional development session at the beginning of the year on recognizing signs of a disability but have had no other formal training on the topic. Teachers expressed concerns that they couldn't differentiate instruction sufficiently to meet the needs of at-risk students due to large class sizes and lack of support within the classroom from paraprofessionals. Finally, there is not a set aside time for special education teachers and classroom teachers to meet and discuss students due to scheduling concerns. Special education teachers indicated that this structure placed limitations on their ability to co-plan and that they intend to build common planning time into the schedule for the coming year. Special education teachers are provided with support from an NHA staff member as well as their assigned assistant principal.

Student Order and Discipline (Benchmark 1.G)

During the time of the Institute's visit, classroom management issues interfered with the school's ability to promote a culture of learning and scholarship. The school was generally safe and orderly, with exceptions in the upper grades. Adults are posted in hallways to monitor transitions and ensure students proceed to class in an orderly manner, particularly in the upper grades where students switch rooms. In the upper grades, a notable exception to safety was a fight in a 7th grade classroom between two students where the teacher screamed for help and other adults rushed to the classroom as students rushed out of neighboring classrooms for a view of the fight. One student was led out of the room by a male staff member while the other walked out on his own with a bloody nose. The lower grades were more orderly, although when students were eating lunch in their classrooms many classes were chaotic and disorderly. Administrators reported that fights were an infrequent occurrence in the school and something they took extremely seriously.

Teachers at BECS are given discretion over classroom management systems and their skills in implementation varied widely. In the 4th and 5th grade classroom management was strong, with 90-100 percent of observed students on task and compliant during observations. While each teacher had a different strategy for classroom management, they all had a system that students were well-versed in and compliant with. Many teachers in the lower grades have a consequence system posted where when a student misbehaves they move down a step on the color chart. However, team inspectors saw little evidence of these systems in use. Some students also have individual behavior sheets that they use throughout the day; teachers record daily behaviors on these and they are sent home. In many classrooms there were misbehaviors that impeded learning without any consequences, including talking over the teacher, hitting, talking to peers, and moving around the classroom. The school has struggled with classroom management in the past and, as part of its attempts to improve this aspect of

the program, recently began taking part in the Capturing Kids Hearts program. Teachers reported that this had improved behavior, although not all teachers still followed the program guidelines. Many observed classrooms had some type of group or class point system to reward students for positive behaviors. However, in only some classes was this regularly used.

BECS has a discipline system in place but at the time of the visit it was inconsistently applied. The school's Parent and Student Handbook clearly lays out what constitutes an act of misconduct and discusses a point system whereby students receive point deductions corresponding to a behavior and once they are out of points they are referred to the board of trustees for expulsion. The handbook also lays out a consequence ladder for point deductions prior to reaching the point of expulsion. However, this point system was never referred to during the evaluation visit. When offenses are severe enough to be considered outside of the classroom, they are first referred to the grade-appropriate assistant principal who makes decisions based on their impression of the situation. Teachers reported that some students get away with more than others based on their history, and that the different assistant principals handle discipline very differently. All three assistant principals expressed the view that only the most severe offenses should be brought to them, once the classroom teacher has explored a variety of other options, including working with the students.

Past staff surveys have indicated that student behavior and school-wide discipline was something about which teachers were unhappy. Therefore, administration along with NHA worked to find a program to use school-wide to improve behavior and selected Capturing Kids Hearts. This program was described as more a means to change the school's culture rather than a behavior management system. It seeks to build relationships with students in hopes of creating a better school community. Teachers were trained in the program over the summer. Classrooms all drew up social contracts at the beginning of the year and teachers are supposed to greet students each day and make time for the sharing of good news. The program also discusses self-monitoring and logical consequences. Teachers reported that the program had improved behavior, though some teachers had more fully implemented the program than others.

Professional Development (Benchmark 1.H)

BECS has devoted significant resources to professional development; however, professional development was not sufficiently targeted to meet the needs of all teachers. All teachers new to the school and NHA attend a network-wide training during the summer that covers a variety of topics. All teachers attend a week of professional development in the summer prior to the opening of school, which includes trainings on new programs, some time for curriculum work, and time to set up classrooms. There is then weekly professional development that covers a variety of topics, with many sessions this year focused on discipline, implementation of learning centers, and differentiated instruction. Sometimes teachers are given this block of time for independent work. Sessions are led generally by an assistant principal, though sometimes teachers turnkey offsite trainings for their peers.

Teachers fill out a needs assessment at the beginning and end of the year, as well as a teacher satisfaction survey twice per year, that administration considers when planning professional development. However, the administration acknowledged that teachers don't always accurately identify their needs, and thus they also base topic selection on their observations of teacher performance.

Teachers do not have individual goals for professional development, though in August the administration lays forth school goals to all teachers. These goals are then used as another means of

selecting professional development topics and followed up on throughout the year. They hope to have individual teachers set goals for themselves in coming years in order to better focus professional development and support.

A common complaint about professional development from BECS teachers was its lack of applicability to their daily classroom practice. This was especially true for teachers in the lower grades, as they felt that much of the professional development was centered around State testing, in which they do not participate. The K-2 assistant principal acknowledged that there was limited early childhood professional development in school, but stated that she offers to send teachers to outside professional developments specific to their practice. Some specials teachers also reported not receiving professional development tailored to their area but that they try to gain as much information as possible from the sessions. Finally, some teachers felt that the weekly professional developments were devoted to administrative issues rather than improving their practice on a too regular basis.

Mission & Key Design Elements (Benchmark 2.A)

BECS has faithfully followed its mission and key design elements. The school's mission speaks about offering a rigorous curriculum with high academic expectations, which is exemplified in the school's move towards Regents courses in the middle school. They also speak of preparing students for higher education and adulthood, which they are working to promote through a focus on high school placement. Character education and development is also a component, which is something they are working to further through the introduction of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program. Parental involvement is a key design element that they are still working to promote, though they have made significant progress. The board is currently working on a strategic plan to get parents more involved. There is a parent committee and parents are often involved in grade team presentations at board meetings but the board and school leadership acknowledged this as an area for growth moving forward.

Parents & Students (Benchmark 2.B)

Based on limited evidence collected, families are satisfied with the school. The school regularly administers parent satisfaction surveys, both the NYCDOE survey and NHA surveys. On the most recent NHA survey BECS had an 86 percent response rate with generally positive responses. Additionally, the school in recent years has had very low student attrition, indicating a high level of parent satisfaction.

Organizational Capacity (Benchmark 2.C)

BECS has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program. The school's organizational structure generally supports distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The principal is the overseer of all staff, with the assistant principals serving as direct supervisors for teachers based on grade level. Specials teachers are also assigned to an assistant principal as supervisor. This seemed clear to teachers in most regards, though some teachers reported being unclear about the role of the principal and the assistant principal in completing their formal evaluations. There is also an educational supervisor from NHA who serves in a superintendent-like capacity. His primary role is providing support and feedback to the principal, including conducting his annual evaluation. His role was larger in earlier years, but as the school become more established

he spends less time in the school, though he does still conduct observations at some points in the year.

BECS is competently managed in most respects. The school has clear priorities aligned with its mission and accountability plan goals, evidenced by the recent focus on enhanced rigorous academics and school culture amongst other things. The school operates in an efficient and organized manner with support from NHA on back office areas such as HR and finance. Teachers reported sufficient resources. Intervention teachers did not have separate materials to use with their students but instead relied on the same commercial programs as used in the classrooms or materials they found themselves. The school's facility generally meets its needs, though there are some shortcomings. The school lacks large common spaces, prohibiting any whole-school gatherings. Morning assemblies are a critical component of the Capturing Kids Hearts program that BECS recently adopted but they have had to forego this due to facility constraints. Additionally, students must eat lunch in their classrooms which teachers said they wished was not needed as it was messy and chaotic.

The rigor of BECS' hiring process varied. The principal described the hiring process as being extremely rigorous, including an initial screening by NHA recruitment staff, multiple interviews, and a demonstration lesson. However, some recently hired teachers reported being hired after only one brief interview. In past years, the school has struggled with teacher retention and over the last two years this has improved. However, many teachers have still been with the school for a relatively short period of time so long-term trends on teacher retention cannot yet be identified.

BECS has maintained sufficient enrollment. In recent years, retention has increased significantly and, according to school leaders, most students leave because they are moving. The school tries to only enroll students in kindergarten through 2nd grade, and this past year only added 5-6 students in the upper grades. They enroll during the school year as well though this has not been necessary this year as retention has been relatively high; BECS began the school year with 730 students and enrollment declined to 718.

Management adequately monitors and evaluates the school's programs and makes changes if necessary. There is a school improvement plan created each year composed of grade level action plans developed by teachers in conjunction with the assistant principals; action plans are based on a variety of factors and perceived areas of need. School administrators had yet to evaluate this year's plans at the time of the visit as assessments were not yet completed, but changes had been made based on other concerns raised. Recent examples include the introduction of Regents courses in the middle school in response to parents' concerns about being more competitive in high schools. Another example is the introduction of the Capturing Kids Hearts program in response to staff survey responses. Additionally, the piloting of guided reading in some grades was a response to assessment results as well as teacher input. Management is monitoring assessment results as well as stakeholder surveys to ensure they make any necessary changes.

Governance (Benchmark 2.D-E)

The board of trustee of BECS has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and provide oversight to the total educational program. The members and the structures and procedures they have put into place allow them to effectively govern the school, and hold school leaders, the management company, and themselves accountable for student achievement.

The board of trustees of BECS was composed of seven members at the time of the renewal visit, four of whom attended the meeting with the inspection team. A variety of skill sets are included on the board, including community organizing, education, finance, and legal. The board has two primary committees, human resources and curriculum and student assessment, which delve deeper into these topics and then report back to the larger board. Many of the board's members have been with the school since before their initial renewal, and some were part of the original application. This allows them to bring a historical perspective to the decision making process. They are conscious of the need for recruiting and selecting new members and it is something they want to do more of moving forward. They generally meet bi-monthly and reported relatively good attendance among trustees. Not all board members live locally and some attend either in person or via conference call when needed. They have established policies and procedure for handling complaints and grievances; the board indicated that recently there have not been any serious complaints. Currently, as well as historically, parents' biggest complaint has been about busing issues, which the board and school report having limited control over.

The board is kept well-informed about the schools progress by both the principal and NHA. This includes assessment data from the NWEA, mock state exams, and state tests. They also receive parent and staff satisfaction surveys regularly. These reports show the school's progress over time, as well as their performance relative to other NHA managed schools. Board members were able to talk in sufficient detail about the school's academic progress and their role in monitoring it. They were aware of the relatively lower performance in literacy and spoke of initiatives taken to address these concerns, including independent reading challenges and a more stable teaching force. One board member described their role as being able to "identify areas of difficulty and challenge the leadership team to come back with solutions." They described this process as similar to how they improved their performance during their first charter term with the help of the principal and NHA and what they continue to do. They were aware of the Accountability Plan goals, but also felt that they shouldn't let up just because they had met these goals, as they had continually increasing expectations. One example of this is their more recent focus on having students admitted to top high schools in New York City and offering Regents courses in the middle school.

The board has systems in place to hold NHA and the school principal accountable. NHA conducts the formal evaluation of the principal, but the board also holds him accountable for meeting the goals in the school's accountability plan. The board meets annually in executive session to discuss the performance of the school leadership team relative to the accountability plan, though they don't have a formal tool for doing so. They have also had numerous conversations with the principal about the importance of putting the school's interests first, despite him being an NHA employee. The board regularly revisits their contract with NHA, making it tougher so that they receive the supports they need as the network expands, as well as giving them better levers to extract themselves from the contract if necessary. It is worth noting that BECS has never turned a profit for NHA, but the board still felt that NHA was responsive to their requests for further investment in the school. After the comptroller's audit, the board revisited the lease to ensure they were paying fair market value. In the end they were paying less than the recent appraisal, and restructured the lease so it was pinned against the charter.

The board of trustees recently held a retreat to discuss a strategic plan moving forward. One goal is to bring on a staff member to do fundraising and ensure they can continue to explain their program offerings. Other priorities include increasing parent engagement, high school placement, and building a playground on site. They felt that they could focus on these priorities now that they have several consecutive years of academic performance.

Conduct of the Visit

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the school evaluation visit at Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School on May 18-19, 2010. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

Maya Lagana (team leader) is an Analyst for School Evaluation for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. She is responsible for scheduling ongoing school evaluation visits, communicating with school team members and administrative staff regarding site visit logistics and requirements, developing and disseminating RFP documents, and coordinating the recruitment and work of consultants. Ms. Lagana worked for New Visions for Public Schools, Achievement First and Boston Collegiate Charter School while in graduate school. Previously, Ms. Lagana was an Assessment Specialist at the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence in Washington D.C., where she helped to develop teacher certification exams and analyzed item level statistics and demographics information. In addition to her extensive background as an analyst, Ms. Lagana also has experience as a third grade classroom teacher at P.S. 195 through the New York City Teaching Fellows Program. Ms. Lagana received her Master of Public Administration degree in Policy Analysis from New York University's Wagner School for Public Service, her Masters of Education degree from Mercy College and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Carleton College.

Simeon Stolzberg (team leader) 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.

Sean Fitzsimons is a Program Analyst for the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York. He supports SUNY's new charter school application process by addressing questions from applicants, reviewing and analyzing new applications, coordinating the review of applications to establish new charter schools by Institute staff and external educational experts, and drafting application summaries and other related documents. Mr. Fitzsimons most recently served as Chair of the Social Studies Department at Manassas Park Middle School in Manassas Park, Virginia where he guided curriculum sequencing and pacing to align the school's courses with state standards, trained and mentored faculty, and designed and implemented courses in Civics and Economics, American Studies, American History, and World Geography. He also taught remedial reading curriculum to special education students and English language learners. Prior to his service at Manassas Park Middle School, Mr. Fitzsimons was an Administrative and Research Assistant at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C. In addition, Mr. Fitzsimons was a visiting instructor at Shanghai Teachers University in Shanghai, China, where he designed and taught curriculum for English language learners. Mr. Fitzsimons received his Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction and Secondary Education Social Studies from George

Mason University and his Bachelor of Arts degrees in International Relations and Political Science from the State University of New York, College at Geneseo.

Kevin Flynn 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.

Dr. Bruce Ballard (external team member) works full time as Professional Development Specialist at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. For part time work he teaches writing courses to research analysts in the financial services industry. He holds a doctorate in Applied Linguistics from Teachers College Columbia University, where he taught courses in TESOL and writing, and two master's degrees in TESOL and Bilingual Education. Dr. Ballard was a Peace Corps Volunteer in South Korea from 1975-1978. He worked in South Korea for five years and in Japan for three, and attended high school in Mexico City. He has taught writing, speaking and pedagogy courses in a dozen countries world-wide, and directed pre-service training programs for Peace Corps Volunteers in Mongolia and the Marshall Islands.

Sarah Tantillo, Ed.D., LLC, (external consultant) creator of The Literacy Cookbook (www.literacycookbook.com), consults in NJ and nationally with charter schools and other schools (esp. urban) seeking to improve student achievement. Sarah taught high school English and Humanities in both suburban and urban New Jersey public schools for 14 years, including seven years at the high-performing North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, where she chaired the Humanities Dept. and her students achieved a 100% passing rate on the Language Arts/Literacy section of the HSPA in 2006 and 2007. She also founded and directed the New Jersey Charter School Resource Center from 1996-1999 and the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association from 1999-2003. She coaches K-12 schools on data-driven instruction; literacy instruction, with emphasis on critical reading, writing, and interdisciplinary curriculum development; school culture-building; and strategic planning. She has studied at Princeton (B.A. '87), Harvard (M.Ed. '91), Johns Hopkins (M.A. '95), and Rutgers (Ed.D. '01). Her dissertation was on culture formation in charter schools.

Ayanna Taylor (external consultant) is a 1994 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania where she received a BA in English Literature. After graduation, Ms. Taylor taught Language Arts at Martin Luther King, Jr. School in Paterson, NJ as a Teach for America corps member for four years where she also served as a member of the School Improvement Team. Ayanna was the founding Director of College Placement & College Liaison at North Star Academy Charter School of Newark. She founded and directed North Star's college placement program, taught high school English, and founded/coached the North Star Step Team. Ms. Taylor achieved a 100% college acceptance and college matriculation rate for North Star's first three graduating classes. In addition to ensuring the best college placement for graduating seniors, in a dual role as the College Alumni Liaison, she actively maintained contact and visited North Star alumni in their respective colleges. Ms. Taylor was also responsible for ensuring student participation in year-round and summer enrichment programs. During her tenure at North Star students traveled to China, Costa Rica, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Paraguay, Alaska,

and many other places to complete community service projects, language study programs, or homestay immersion programs. Students also took college-level coursework at elite universities, such as Georgetown and Yale Universities. Prior to working at North Star, Ms. Taylor worked as Associate Director for the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association and as an editor with Pearson Education working in their Globe Fearon special education division. Recent work included a role as an instructional strategies specialist with a NJ-based consulting firm, working in school districts to coach teachers. Prior to expanding her educational consulting business, Ms. Taylor supported Teach For America alumni as the Director of Alumni Affairs for the Newark region. In this role, she provided resource and coaching for alumni moving into school leadership and political leadership, as well as managing alumni stewardship efforts. During her first year, alumni volunteer engagement and financial donations increased over 10 percent. She is also a graduate of the Leadership Newark fellowship. Ms. Taylor received an M.A. in Public Administration from Rutgers University Newark and completed coursework towards a Masters Degree in African American Studies at Columbia University.

APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.

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

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

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
State University Renewal Benchmark 1B Use of Assessment Data	<p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and state performance standards; 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; the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy; the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; 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; the school's teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students; 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; the school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and 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.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1C Curriculum	<p>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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; the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school's curriculum framework,

	<p>identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade; 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; teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school's curriculum; the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and the curriculum supports the school's stated mission.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach; 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; lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators; 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; all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time; 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 teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement; the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement); the school's instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness; 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; 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; the school's instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1F At-Risk Students	<p>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs; all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program; the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students; 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; all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students’ Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals; 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 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.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1G Student Order & Discipline	<p>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident; 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 throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
State University Renewal Benchmark 1H Professional Development	<p>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.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program; the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional programs; annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals; the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined; the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability; the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted; the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2D Board Oversight	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school; 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; 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; the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity; 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; 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; the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and 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.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2E Governance	<p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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; 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

	<p>structural continuity;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
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