

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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## EXCELLENCE BOYS CHARTER SCHOOL OF BEDFORD-STUYVESANT

Visit Date  
November 16-17, 2010



CONDUCTED BY CLASS MEASURES  
ON BEHALF OF THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE



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# EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

## Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant (Excellence Boys) was visited by an external school inspection team from Class Measures on behalf of the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) on November 16 and 17, 2010. The school opened in August 2004 and at the time of the visit served 434 students in grade kindergarten through grade 7.

Excellence Boys has developed and implemented an effective system to collect, analyze, distribute, and use student achievement and assessment data. Excellence Boys administers assessments in all core academic areas that are aligned to the curriculum and state standards. Data is used to modify instruction to meet the needs of students and measure progress towards Accountability Plan goals. The school has standardized assessment policies and procedures in place across all grades for scoring assessments. The school communicates assessment results to all stakeholders including parents and the board of trustees who use data to measure success in meeting Accountability Plan goals.


The school has an organized and cohesive curriculum in grades kindergarten through grade 7 in all subjects, which is horizontally and vertically aligned to New York state standards. The curriculum supports the school's college preparatory mission and the review team observed through classroom observations that high quality instruction is evident in most classes throughout the school. Teachers demonstrated depth of content knowledge and concepts were presented accurately.

In all grades, there is a strong curriculum emphasis on improving literacy skills. The review team found evidence of a curriculum responsive to assessment data and implemented by well-trained teachers. The team observed that 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. An instructional strength across both the elementary and middle academies is making maximum use of instructional time in the classroom. There is an urgency of action and language about the importance of academics and no tolerance for distractions. The school has implemented a code of conduct across the school and has published family handbooks, which include the discipline policy.

There is strong instructional leadership in place at Excellence Boys. Under the leadership of the founding principal, the school structure is divided into elementary and middle academies. Each academy has a director focused on academics and a director of operations. The elementary academy also has in place a dean of students and a director of staff development.

The school uses a multi-tiered prevention model with three tiers of intervention to help students who are struggling. Differentiated grouping is used throughout the school in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, which enables classroom teachers as well as specialists to target their instruction to students' needs. The instructional staff collaborates in bi-weekly Student Support Team (SST) grade-level conferences.

Excellence Boys has in place a professional development program that is designed to meet the needs of the school and the differentiated needs of teachers. The plan is based on a data driven needs assessment



and is aligned with school's mission. Teachers meet for professional development sessions four weeks in the summer before school begins and most Friday afternoons during the school year. Professional development offerings are differentiated to meet the specific needs of teachers.

The school is faithful to its mission, which is aligned with the educational program included in the charter contract. Programs at the school are aligned with the Key Design Elements included in the school description and the school's charter. Parents and students were very satisfied with the school and its programs with parents citing the leadership of the school's principal as a key reason why they selected the school.

The school and its current partner Uncommon Schools have implemented an effective academic and operations structure that allows the school to be managed efficiently, and allows the principal to focus on academics and instructional leadership. Beginning in school year 2009-2010, the school was reconfigured as two academies: elementary and middle. The school has elementary and middle academy academic and operation directors for each academy which allows school leaders to focus on teaching and learning rather than management issues, such as human resources and budgeting.

The review team examined board minutes and bylaws and interviewed nine members of the board of directors. Excellence Boys has an active 18 member board that has the requisite skills to effectively govern the school. The board has developed and approved the mission and academic goals included in the school's Accountability Plan. Board members indicated that a system is in place to assure that Accountability Plan goals are met. The board relies on the managing director and chief operating officer of Uncommon Schools, in collaboration with the principal of the school, to implement and monitor systems to meet school goals and priorities. The team found that the board was in compliance with New York State Public Meeting Laws. The board has not conducted a self-evaluation nor has it conducted an evaluation of the principal; however, the managing director of Uncommon Schools works closely with the principal and provides feedback to the board. The board has not conducted a self-evaluation. Uncommon Schools asks school leaders to submit an evaluation of its performance, followed by a self-evaluation by Uncommon Schools. Results are provided to the board.

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## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION<sup>1</sup>

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### Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	February 2003
Date Initial Charter Approved by Operation of Law	June 2003
School Opening Date	August 2004

### Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2004-05 to 2005-06	600 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, NY	All	NYC CSD 16
2006-07 to Present	225 Patchen Avenue, Brooklyn, NY	All	NYC CSD 16

### Partner Organizations

	Partner Name	Partner Type	Dates of Service
Current	Uncommon Schools, Inc.	CMO	2006-Present

### Current Mission Statement

The mission of Excellence Charter School is to prepare its students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from outstanding college preparatory high schools and colleges.

### Current Key Design Elements

• A culture that expects excellence.
• Small class sizes.
• A focus on literacy.
• Assigned homework beginning in kindergarten.
• The involvement of parents.
• An extended day and year.
• Sharing “Core Knowledge”.
• Assessment early and often to drive instruction.
• School uniforms.
• Character development and community of learners.

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this section was provided by the SUNY Charters Schools Institute.

## School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2004-05	88	88	90	K-1	K-1	190
2005-06	152	152	135	K-2	K-2	190
2006-07	214	175	177	K-3	K-3	189
2007-08	273		220	K-4	K-4	188
2008-09	329		286	K-5	K-5	188
2009-10	357		355	K-6	K-6	188
2010-11	421		TBD	K-7	K-7	188

## Student Demographics

	2007-08 <sup>3</sup>		2008-09 <sup>4</sup>		2009-10	
	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of New York City School District 16 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment	Percent of New York City School District 16 Enrollment	Percent of School Enrollment <sup>5</sup>	Percent of New York City School District 16 Enrollment <sup>6</sup>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	N/A
Black or African American	100%	85%	97%	84%	91%	N/A
Hispanic	0%	12%	2%	13%	4%	N/A
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	N/A
White	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	N/A
Multiracial	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	N/A
<b>Special Populations</b>						
Students with Disabilities <sup>7</sup>	11%	N/A	11%	N/A	12%	N/A

<sup>2</sup> 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.)

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Source: 2009-10 Demographics and Limited English Proficient Percentages calculated from BEDS reports submitted at the beginning of the school year. This information is unverified by the schools. It also does not include Free/Reduced Lunch status, but rather categorizes students as "economically disadvantaged." Free/reduced lunch figures were provided by the school.

<sup>6</sup> Aggregated district data not yet available for 2009-10.

<sup>7</sup> New York State Education Department does not report special education data. School data is school-reported. District data from NYSED Special Education School District Data Profile.

Limited English Proficient	2%	3%	1%	3%	1%	N/A
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>						
Eligible for Free Lunch	33	70	42	74	48	N/A
Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch	26	6	19	6	18	N/A

#### Current Board of Trustees<sup>8</sup>

Board Member Name	Position/Committees
David Saltzman	Chair
Joseph Wayland	Vice-Chair
Laura Blankfein	
Cecily Carson	
Loren Compton-Williams	
Celestina De La Garza	Ex Officio, Non-Voting
Sabrina Dycus	
Paul Tudor Jones II	
Alison Mass	
Tony Pasquariello	
Brett Peiser	
Rosa Pizzi	
Evan Rudall	
Jabali Sawicki	Ex Officio, Non-Voting
Tokumbo Shobowale	
Chrystal Stokes Williams	
Samantha Tweedy	Ex Officio, Non-Voting
Shakima Williams-Jones	

#### School Leader(s)

School Year	School Leader(s) Name and Title
2004-05 to Present	Jabali Sawicki, Principal
2006-07 to Present	Brett Peiser, Uncommon Schools Managing Director

<sup>8</sup> Source: Institute board information.

## School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2004-05	First Year	Institute	April 5, 2005
2005-06	Second Year	Institute	April 25-26, 2006
2006-07	Third Year	External	March 27-28, 2007
2007-08	None	N/A	N/A
2008-09	Initial Renewal	Institute	December 16-18, 2008
2009-10	None	N/A	N/A
2010-11	Seventh Year	External	November 16-17, 2010



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## BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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### Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?

#### Benchmark 1B: Use of Assessment Data

The school has developed a strong and effective assessment program that provides regular, in depth, and accessible data to teachers. All staff involved in instruction are supported in the use of this data and apply it within their classrooms. Instruction at the school is strongly data driven and focused on the improvement of student learning. Interim and comprehensive assessments are administered to students across the school and are aligned to the instruction at the school and the state grade levels' performance standards for each content area.

The school effectively collects all assessment data and maintains a database of assessment results across the academies. Data is effectively used to modify instruction to better meet the needs of students and progress towards accountability goals. Data is analyzed and presented to stakeholders through data dashboards as well as in other forms. Teachers maintain binders of current student data in their classrooms. Middle academy teachers participate in full day professional development to evaluate data following major assessments, followed by one-on-one data support by the middle academy director. Elementary teachers have time blocked for them to review assessment data after its issuance, followed by individual data support by the elementary academy director. All teachers are provided with interim reflection worksheets for each student, which are discussed with the teacher's academy director. The interim reflection worksheets document how instruction will be modified for each student in the teacher's classroom. The school promotes a six week cycle of "review, plan, and reflect" for teachers, which is linked to the school's assessment calendar.

The school has standardized assessment policies and procedures in place across the school for scoring assessments. Examples of this standardization includes the elementary school teachers' practice of swapping open response questions for grading to eliminate impartiality, middle academy interim assessments being graded across the Uncommon Schools, and a common rubric in place to norm the grading of writing prompts across the academies.

The school leaders effectively use data to monitor student progress and the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals. The elementary academy director reported that the goals in the Accountability Plan are used to guide the planning process across the school. The assessment data are used to make modifications to instruction at the instructional leader levels and to identify programmatic issues and measure progress towards goals at the board level. Examples of modifications put in place in response to weaknesses identified through data analysis include, at the elementary level, moving additional staff into classrooms where students were not making satisfactory progress and moving from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment to the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) assessment in response to weak state assessment results in reading. In the middle academy, staff members with weaker student outcomes are supported by additional staff members. In addition, weak assessment results for students in non-fiction were remediated by adding professional development for teachers in this area and implementing a new focus on non-fiction across the middle school where students now receive five to seven hours of instruction and exposure to non-fiction literature weekly.

The school regularly and effectively communicates with parents and guardians. Parents of elementary academy students are invited to a beginning of the year literacy night, where parents are shown literacy assessments and texts and where the literacy program is described to them. Elementary academy parents also receive information on their child progress on the October STEP assessment via phone calls from teachers. At teacher conferences, which parents are expected to attend when grades are issued, teachers discuss assessment data and the student report cards with parents. In the middle academy, parents at orientation were shown a slide show detailing the most recent state assessment data, changes to the state assessments, and the shift in cut scores. Assessment data from the comprehensive exams contributes to 25 percent of each middle academy student's grade and is reported on the trimester report card. Parents review packets of student information during conferences. **At the beginning of the year, state test results are reviewed with families.**

A review of board minutes showed that Board members receive data on school performance, including information on the financial status of the school, the academic performance of students and more general information on students, and updates on activities within the school.

### **Benchmark 1C: Curriculum**

Excellence Boys has a clearly defined curriculum in grades kindergarten through grade 7 in all subjects, is fully aligned to New York state standards, and supports the school's college preparatory mission. The team reviewed sample curriculum documents provided by the school and interviewed teachers and school leaders about curriculum. Curriculum documents, though not in uniform formats, contained pacing charts, lists of skills and objectives, key vocabulary terms, assessment activities, required materials, and when appropriate, references to textbook pages. Some curriculum documents specifically reference the state standards. The kindergarten through grade 4 social studies scope and sequence contained "enduring understandings" and "essential questions." Some documents, such as the kindergarten mathematics scope and sequence, provided supplemental lessons and "extension ideas." All information was well-organized and accessible to teachers.

In interviews with teachers and school leaders, they described a hybrid curricular program. For example, Excellence Boys use a combination of Core Knowledge and Scott Foresman texts in science and social studies. At all grades, there is a strong focus on developing and maintaining strong literacy skills and the school uses a guided reading approach with leveled readers in the elementary academy. At the middle academy, the school has developed its own ELA and mathematics curriculum based on New York State standards, relying extensively on Uncommon School materials. All grades use the Saxon mathematics texts. Teachers described the use of STEP assessments and other data to continually modify lessons, and to ensure that curricular materials met the needs of students.

The curriculum as implemented is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade. Daily learning goals are posted in each classroom and are consistent across the grade level. Vertical alignment was evident during the visit in reading and writing instruction where foundation skills were introduced in the early elementary grades and further developed in grades 4-7. Teachers stated that the opportunities for training with peers from other Uncommon Schools helped to insure consistency and rigor in curricula, and that student assessment data strongly influenced their curricular choices. They also stated that they receive feedback from school leaders about their lesson plans. The team reviewed lesson plans and templates, which guided teachers and helped them to include all of the school's required lesson segments: Aim, objective, oral drill, hook, guided practice, independent practice, checks for

understanding, etc. The team found that the lesson plans reviewed were complete with regards to curriculum information but contained little information on meeting the needs of different learners.

In interviews with teachers, all were fully aware of the curricula that they were responsible to teach. Curricular documents are readily available on their shared drive, according to interviewees. School leaders indicated that the review team would find a consistency in lesson plans and implemented curriculum, common language, and similar tools and strategies used. The review team found evidence of a mature curricular program responsive to assessment data and implemented by well-trained teachers.

Teachers and school leaders continue to review and revise curriculum throughout the school year in response to the analysis of assessment data. Teachers noted that summer training in curriculum development was also provided and they had access to video footage of exemplar teachers. Lead teachers provide classroom teachers with feedback about curriculum during weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Teachers reported that on Friday afternoons, when students are dismissed early each week, they meet as grade level teams for planning and professional development. Middle academy teachers also stated that the Uncommon Schools is a source of support for curriculum development. While the support of Uncommon Schools is seen as an important resource by school leaders, they also stated that they have flexibility in planning modifications to the curriculum. They are committed, however, to insuring that Excellence Boys' students will be well-prepared as they join other Uncommon Schools' students in high school.

#### **Benchmark 1D: Pedagogy**

The team observed through classroom observations that high quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school, and teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach. Teachers demonstrated depth of content knowledge and concepts were presented accurately. They used content specific vocabulary and expected students to do the same in both the elementary and middle academies. One fourth grade teacher told her class, "I see students using inverse operations to check their work." Similarly, teachers expected students to use appropriate terminology in their responses. Teachers at the elementary level were skilled in their instruction of reading, providing grade-appropriate whole group instruction as well as skillful small group targeted instruction.

The team observed that 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. At the elementary academy, instruction was uniformly rigorous. Observations of middle academy classes showed inconsistent expectations around rigor, with instruction sometimes delayed, or on hold, as the teachers focused on behavior. Students were observed having to redo routines if they did not meet expectations. For example, if students had not all stood correctly behind their chairs, they would have to complete the routine again using up instructional time. Across both academies learning objectives were clear, posted on the board, and in some classrooms, the team observed students and/or teachers referring to their learning objectives. Objectives in lesson plans are listed in the SWBAT (students will be able to) format.

Sample lesson plans from September 2010 to November 2010 reviewed by the team were aligned to the school's curriculum and to the state standards. Plans were rich in detail with slight variations; for example, some teachers listed potential student misunderstandings and some provided examples of modeling. All had aims, Do-Nows, vocabulary, key points, hooks, and independent activities. Some

referred specifically to assessment activities and others referred more generally to checking for student understanding. A few contained “adjustments” for high, medium, and low students. The school provided two samples of lesson plans from the middle academy with sections for reflections. In these, teachers were prompted to respond to a number of questions which aligned with the school’s goals; for example, “Describe this week’s integration of College Readiness Skills,” “How do you plan to implement feedback that you have received on plans or observations?” and “What support do you need in order to help these students be successful?” Teachers reported that all lesson plans are located on the server, that they are reviewed by school leaders, and that they receive feedback on the quality of their plans.

Differentiated instruction was observed primarily through flexible grouping and differentiated reading materials in kindergarten through grade 4. Whole group instruction was the most often used delivery method at the middle academy. Other forms of differentiation in pedagogical techniques or assessments were not readily observed by the team. In some instances, quiet discussion between a teacher and a student who was struggling was observed, and additional adult support was present in some classes. Nevertheless, numerous structures are in place for teachers to provide individual or small group support to individual students. In elementary ELA and mathematics classes, the team observed several instances where the whole group was broken into two or three smaller groups, each taught in separate spaces by another adult. According to teachers and school leaders, opportunities for differentiated instruction also occur during tutoring sessions, Saturday school, homework help sessions, and Response to Intervention (RTI) interventions.

Throughout both academies, it was evident to the team that a primary goal for instruction was keeping students focused and engaged. Skills needed to accomplish this varied among the teachers and were more successful at the elementary level. At the middle academy, despite good lessons, some teachers struggled to implement age-appropriate behavioral expectations. In one example, a teacher planned to have students work in pairs but after one very brief trial, discontinued and returned to silent reading because students did not have the appropriate soft voices. In another class, several minutes were spent practicing the correct way to stand for oral drill. In both cases, student interest and compliance decreased as the focus on behavior increased.

Throughout the school, teachers used common practices including timers, reminders, pre-alerts, motivators etc. Many of the staff was highly skilled in the use of non-verbal cues and motivational chants. Pacing was sharp and teachers were highly sensitive to who was on task and who was not. Oral drills were in place at the middle academy to keep students on task, though some instructional time was practicing to get it right. The team observed students that were generally highly-engaged and eager to provide teachers with responses to questions.

An instructional strength across both academies is making maximum use of instructional time in the classroom. There is an urgency of action and language about the importance of academics and no tolerance for distractions. The team saw many examples of day-to-day continuity when teachers and students made references and connections to prior learning, or built on concepts presented in earlier lessons. Transitions were efficient, particularly through the use of timers and verbal alerts by teachers. Student materials in classes were organized for quick access and stored in pencil cases looped to their desks, or in sacks placed on the backs of chairs.

The team observed examples of thought provoking questions with good wait time for student reflection. One grade 6 science teacher asked, “Why don’t you see any flagella on a skin cell?” When one student answered incompletely, the teacher returned to him after others answered, to check his understanding again. A fourth grade mathematics teacher challenged his students who were completing a quick fact

check, “Stop and think, do I have the right answer? Not just a checkmark.” A fourth grade teacher challenged students during reading by asking “What evidence do you have?” “What makes you think that?” “Why is that important?” “How did you figure it out?” Teachers set high expectations for quality responses in all of the grades, and built in the capacity for successful independent work. At the kindergarten level, a teacher asked, “Where can you find a resource to know what to write?”

### **Benchmark 1G: Student Order and Discipline**

An instructional strength across both academies is making maximum use of instructional time in the classroom. There is an urgency of action and language about the importance of academics and no tolerance for distractions.

There are two separate family handbooks at Excellence Boys: an elementary academy family handbook and a middle academy family handbook. Both discipline policies included in the handbooks stated that the approach to discipline is rooted in the belief that the learning environment is sacred. The school will do whatever it takes to make sure that every child is physically, emotionally, mentally, and intellectually safe and makes sure that every child has the opportunity to learn without needless interruptions. Both academies use consequences and problem solving strategies to promote positive behavior and correct problem behavior. Faculty will try and catch students doing the right thing in both academies. All students wear uniforms. Each handbook has a code of conduct with a list of behaviors and consequences.

The middle academy director is responsible for managing discipline at the middle academy and the dean of students is responsible for managing discipline at the elementary academy. At the elementary academy, the dean of students spends time in classrooms offering support to teachers and giving them feedback on how to be emotionally constant and serve the needs of each student. There is a check system in place and behavior logs are sent home each day with kindergarten through grade 4 students for parents to sign. Four checks on the log indicates your behavior was excellent. Three checks indicates a good job, two checks means you had some challenges in your day and if you had one check there were some more serious issues associated with your behavior. Misbehavior is called a community violation and there is a community violation chair in each classroom for time outs. There is a demerit system in place at the Middle Academy. For every three demerits a student receives in a week, the student serves detention after school. If a student receives nine demerits in a week, the student will serve an extended Friday afternoon detention. Chronic offenders can receive out of school suspensions.

The teachers use a variety of classroom management techniques and daily routines that were consistently seen by team members during classroom observations. One technique observed was the STAR techniques: sit up, track the speaker with your eyes, ask and answer questions, and respect others at all times. Teachers were observed giving positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior: “I see one scholar with his pencil down and now I see three.” Teachers were skillful in handling difficult situations. For example, one teacher was helping a youngster through a crying episode and she took him aside and talked about being sad and asked him what made him happy. Slowly as they talked he stopped crying. Teachers also asked students to do something again if they had not complied correctly the first time. All teachers in the elementary academy moved to child level when speaking to students individually.

All stakeholders stated that Excellence Boys is a safe school. Parents interviewed said that there is no bullying at the school because students learn early the Creed values such as brotherhood, loyalty, love and courage. The students also learn conflict resolution and problems with behavior are addressed



immediately. They stated that the students are known individually by the teachers and leadership, and the team observed the principal and academic and operation directors greeting students as they arrived at school. Parents stated the doors are locked and that when you pick up a student you will be asked for identification if you are not known to school personnel. Students stated that the teachers and other school staff such as the nurse respect and care for them. They stated that there are security cameras and a security guard at the school. Students told the team that the school rules keep you organized, teach you discipline and consequences, but most of all teach you the importance of learning so you can excel.

### **Benchmark IE: Instructional Leadership**

There is strong instructional leadership in place at Excellence Boys. Under the direction of the founding principal, the school structure is divided into an elementary academy and a middle academy. Each academy has a director and a director of operations. The elementary academy also has in place a dean of students and a director of staff development.

High expectations for student achievement are grounded in the school's mission that each student who enters the school will successfully graduate from both high school and college. Excellence Boys is a college preparatory school and every student becomes aware of that early in their enrollment. All classrooms are named after colleges and college banners hang everywhere around the school. Each student interviewed by the team could talk about colleges that they wanted to attend. In the middle academy, as part of the oral drill, students were expected to be ready to share their college choice and the reason they were interested in that particular college. Student work is called "life work." According to the principal, everything done at the school is connected to academics to show the boys the power of education. Each choice made such as the allocation of time, the structure of meetings, prep time for teachers, or the involvement of parents, is about high academic expectations and how to continue to meet them.

High expectations are in place for teachers. There is a faculty and staff handbook that outlines all personnel policies. There is a hiring process that screens for the best candidates. There are expectations for instruction, enforcing classroom behavior, analyzing achievement data, attending meetings and professional development as well as parent contact. Teachers interviewed by the team stated that the focus is on academic achievement and that they are expected to conduct the appropriate assessments and to analyze the data to improve instruction and achievement. They are also expected to contact parents twice a month.

Data included in the organizational capacity section the report indicates teacher turnover has been an issue at the school and the principal stated that they are working to find ways to discover what teachers want that will encourage and support them. The school is looking for continuity because it is important to have institutional memory and to attract enthusiastic teachers because the boys need to be inspired. They are working in small ways to give time back to teachers. They are discussing tutoring one day a week rather than two and calling parents once a month rather than twice. Additionally, the school is working to grow leadership by looking for places for teacher leaders to help the school. A recent example is a leadership role for a grade 5 teacher to help students transition from the elementary academy to the middle academy.

The school has an evaluation system in place for teachers. It is quite lengthy and combines content specific categories, such as Saxon mathematics, reading mastery and reading comprehension, and writing, with such categories as curriculum and instruction and school culture to name a few. The

leadership team said that they are working to reduce the length of the document to make it more effective. The evaluation is conducted annually and includes a rubric key: 4 is advanced, 3 is proficient, 2 is working towards proficient and 1 is needs development. The team reviewed a sample teacher evaluation that reflected the detailed feedback over the year and the rubric rating for each category. This annual review is a summation of the feedback that has been given to teachers throughout the year.

There is extensive instructional support as well as clear instructional guidelines in place for teachers. There is an 87 page document entitled Instructional Guidelines 2010-2011. This document outlines school expectations, routines and rituals. It looks at literacy, numeracy, writing and core knowledge. For each area there are strategies for support and challenge as well as best practices, planning and assessment. There are behavior strategies and guidelines for homework. A number of these practices are based on The Taxonomy of Effective Teaching Practices. Teachers report feedback bi-weekly from their supervisor. They stated that there is a different focus area from the taxonomy every two weeks and they receive immediate feedback from their observer. For example, a quick focus sheet would ask questions about the Do Now. Are you circulating to each scholar quickly? Is the Do Now between 3-5 minutes long? Are you spending the appropriate time on the Do Now? Several other questions would be asked with a circled yes or no on the slip. The observer leaves the sheet for the teacher upon exiting the classroom. The teachers also stated that the school has an extensive collection of videos from which to see best practice. They have the opportunity to visit other classrooms and are encouraged to do so. Additionally, in the elementary academy there is a staff development coordinator who is assigned to new teachers and their development. The team observed the principal modeling best practice in the middle school where he has been working to support a teacher.

The school leadership has in place structures to ensure that the school is meeting the needs of the at-risk students. There are weekly SST and student support office (SSO) meetings that are attended by the principal and the appropriate academy director as well as appropriate staff such as teachers, the dean of students, and social worker. Each week the principal meets with the academy directors to talk about each scholar. The principal also gets weekly updates on students including behavior.

According to the principal, the leadership team and the board monitor the school's academic goals through the accountability plan. They also look at the academic program by academy, through interim assessments, the Terra Nova, state assessments and through personal observations and lots of conversations. They look for trends at both the internal school level and Uncommon Schools and state level.

The principal stated that the school has gotten better at developing teachers by responding to the need for consistency, quality and quantity of teacher feedback. Systems are now in place for that to happen. He stated that they are also benefitting by looking at best practices across all Uncommon Schools. He said the next challenge for the school is developing the middle academy. The team observations indicate looking at middle academy transition issues, as well as the developmental appropriateness of instruction and behavior management practices will be important as the middle academy expands to grade 8.

#### **Benchmark 1F: At-Risk Students**

Excellence is highly effective in helping students who are struggling academically. The school uses a multi-tiered prevention model with three tiers of intervention. Differentiated grouping is used throughout the school in ELA and mathematics, which enables classroom teachers as well as specialists

to target their instruction to students' needs. The instructional staff collaborates in bi-weekly grade-based conferences called SST conferences. The SST consists of a special education coordinator, a special education teacher, and a social worker; however, the dean of students is also a participant when appropriate as well as grade-level teachers. The special education coordinator or special education teacher facilitates these meetings to devise and maintain individual student support plans for both academic and behavioral issues. The administrative staff including the principal, the dean of students, the special education coordinator, the special education teacher, the reading specialist, and the social worker convene weekly in conferences called Student Support Office (SSO) meetings. At the end of 2009, there were 25 students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and one English language learner (ELL) student who did not require language support; however, testing determined he did not require support services.

Interviews with classroom teachers and with members of the student support team indicated that there is a strong system of communication and follow-up among adults who assist students who are struggling. Not as evident to the team were actual differentiation strategies implemented within the classroom. Nevertheless, documentation reviewed by the team indicated that teachers were provided with extensive information and supported by the appropriate staff, as well as with training and resources.

The procedure for identifying and providing intervention to students is centralized and well-organized and information about interventions and progress is well-documented and tracked. The team reviewed several samples of student information gathered prior to SST meetings; information was comprehensive and indicated the involvement of several teachers who interacted with the students. Plans were developed around targeted areas of concern, previously attempted interventions reviewed, and new strategies were suggested.

Student performance throughout the year is used to determine participation in Saturday school and summer school. Routine and frequent teacher consultation with the learning specialists, social worker, and the dean, coupled with careful monitoring of assessment data, enables all adults involved to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the school's intervention programs.

### **Benchmark 1H: Professional Development**

Excellence Boys has in place a comprehensive professional development program that is designed to meet the needs of the school and the differentiated needs of teachers. The plan is based on a data driven needs assessment and is aligned with school's mission.

There are four weeks of professional development and orientation time scheduled in August before classes begin. Time is spent on content specific topics as well as on school culture and norms. The first week is devoted to new and returning teachers from the elementary academy. According to the professional development schedule reviewed by the team, some of the topics covered during the first week include: data driven instruction, school culture, classroom management, reading mastery, Saxon mathematics, and curriculum development. Additionally, there are workshop breakout groups and team time for team meetings. During the second and third weeks, more workshops are scheduled, which are focused on curriculum and school culture. The last week teachers have time to set up their classrooms. As part of the summer professional development, the middle academy professional development work focused on the question: What does it mean to be an excellent scholar? Topics for middle academy



summer work include: data driven instruction and data analysis, building an excellent lesson plan, model teaching and excellent classroom management.

School is released early each Friday and teachers collaborate on professional development activities during this time. Some topics for the Friday work include: data analysis, checking for understanding, and sweating the small stuff. Uncommon Schools also offers professional development during the year, and also collaborates with the school on summer professional development.

At the elementary academy there is a staff development director who offers workshops and supports for new teachers. A review of the job description of the director of staff development shows that he supports elementary teachers in identifying external professional development opportunities aligned with the Excellence Boys’ approach to instruction, classroom management, and school culture. Other examples of the directors support elementary teachers include coaching teachers on a variety of instructional techniques and integrating videotaped lesson into feedback and debriefing sessions.

Teachers interviewed in a focus group stated that professional development at the school has evolved over time, particularly at the kindergarten through grade 4 level. They stated that as the Uncommon Schools has grown there are more kindergarten through grade 4 teachers, which has led to the allocation of more Uncommon Schools resources for professional development. They also said that professional development offerings have become more differentiated depending upon teacher goals and experience. The principal told the team that professional development differentiation is important in order to support individual teacher growth. Teachers also told the team that requests for conferences provided outside school are honored.

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

**Benchmark 2A: Mission and Key Design Elements**

The mission of the Excellence Boys states, “Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant prepares students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from outstanding college preparatory high schools and colleges.” Excellence provides a strong educational program, targeted at developing a strong knowledge base and the academic skills necessary for students to achieve this goal. There is a strong support system in place for students who may be struggling academically that includes tutoring support, homework help, an advisory program, and more intensive interventions as necessary. Excellence is substantially in alignment with the Key Design Elements, although some programs have shifted slightly over time. The following Key Design Elements were provided to the team during the onsite visit.

**Key Design Elements**

*Expect Excellence*-The school is focused on helping students achieve at high levels. Teachers are provided with a document entitled, “Instructional Guidelines” which details the Uncommon Schools instructional approach. This approach includes promoting student performance through a “strict, warm” classroom management style. This approach was observed by team members to be effectively in use during classroom observations.

*Recruit Top Teachers*-The school has an established and effective process in place to recruit top teachers. Uncommon Schools provides support for the recruitment process for all Uncommon

Schools. Preliminary evaluation of teacher candidates is conducted by Uncommon Schools and promising candidates are provided to schools for the leaders to consider in their search. Uncommon Schools visited every Teach for America site and graduate schools of education to recruit teachers and now maintains a database of the teacher sources that have yielded the best candidates. In addition, Uncommon Schools provides a compensation plan that is competitive with city schools. Uncommon Schools has also partnered with KIPP and Achievement First to create Teacher U at Hunter College which provides teachers with the opportunity to earn a Master's degree in teaching at a very low cost and in a program which is compatible with their work schedule.

*Focus on Literacy*-The school provides nearly three hours of literacy instruction per day in the lower grades, with the number of hours dropping to two hours per grade in grades 3 and up. This program includes sustained silent reading, shared reading, guided reading and writer's workshop. Students read a minimum of 25-50 age appropriate books per year. Students maintain a reading log of external reading activities and are required to read 15 minutes per day for grades k-2 and 30 minutes per grade for older grades. Students are also assigned reading for vacation periods. Students carry books with them at all times and read during times when there are breaks in instruction or when students have finished work early.

*Share "Core Knowledge"*-According to the managing director of Uncommon Schools, although Hirsch's Core Knowledge program was originally in use at the school to promote student access to "the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world," this program is no longer being used as a foundational program. Although classes identified as "Core" classes exist within the school, these classes represent combined science and social studies courses and do not substantially reflect the original Core Knowledge program.

*Assign Homework*-According to the elementary academy director, students are assigned homework in compliance with the charter. This includes a minimum of 30 minutes per day of homework for each child beginning in kindergarten, increasing to a minimum of 90 minutes per day by grade 3, and two hours by grade 5. Homework is assigned in weekly packets. Students are provided the opportunity to work on their homework through the Lifework program in the middle school grades. This program also provides opportunities for students to be supported in the development of study skills.

*Assess Early and Often to Drive the Instructional Program*-The school has a strong and well-designed assessment system that provides rich data for use in the classrooms and guidance for teachers on how best to use this data.

- *Students are assessed regularly using reliable reading assessments to determine their word recognitions skills*-Excellence Boys administers the developmental literacy assessment STEP to students in kindergarten through grade 4. These assessments are administered five times annually to determine progress, provide formative data for targeting instruction in the classrooms.
- *Students take a norm-referenced test in reading and math using a reliable instrument such as the Terra Nova*-According to information provided by the elementary academy director and a review of the school assessment calendar, the school administers the Terra Nova assessment to all students in the school in mathematics and reading. Kindergarten students are assessed at the beginning of the school year to establish baseline data on their abilities in mathematics and reading and all students, including kindergarten students, are assessed at the end of the school year in mathematics and reading to measure progress over the year.

- *Students take pre- and post- comprehensive exams on the subject specific core knowledge areas-* Interim assessments are administered to students on a regular basis. The elementary academy administers bi-monthly composition assessments for kindergarten through grade 4 five times a year, ELA interim assessments for grades 1 through 4 three times per year, mathematics interim assessments for kindergarten through grade 4 three times per year, and science interim assessments to grades 3 through 4 annually. Middle academy students take comprehensive exams in science, math procedures, math problem solving, reading, and history three times per year. In addition, students in the middle academy participate in interim assessments in ELA and mathematics four times per year. All of these assessments are linked to the grade level standards for the state and are monitored closely by teachers and administrators to determine how students are progressing.
- *By the time students reach third grade, they take the statewide reading and math tests in accordance with the No Child Left Behind law-*Students in grades 3 and above participate in the state assessment program in reading and mathematics.
- *Report cards, which parents pick up at the school four times each year, contain qualitative and quantitative comments, reflecting the mission and seriousness of the school-*Samples of report cards reviewed by the team included measures of performance of the student's performance against the Excellence Boys creed. Students received letter grades on their performance in areas such as brotherhood/loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, love, and scholarship. In addition, students were assigned grades for academic performance. Comments were judged by the team to be rigorous and detailed and they provided rich insight for parents as to the academic performance of their child. Parents are required to meet with teachers to pick up their child's report cards.

*Make More Time-*Upon review of the schedule and calendar and through interviews with staff, the team determined that the school operates under an extended day, with all students receiving regular instruction between the hours of 7:15 A.M. to 4 P.M. A variety of enrichment activities are available to students after regular school hours for all grade levels. The school also has an extended year, with students beginning school in late August and continuing through the end of June.

*Develop Character-*The school has a program in place for students to work on character development. Students were observed by team members being required to shake hands with the teachers as they entered classrooms, making strong eye contact as they did so. Team members observed that students meet in community assemblies at least once per week, where the development of character is promoted. Students receive awards for character traits they have demonstrated such as courage and a "spirit stick" is awarded to one exemplary student each week. Students are supported in their planning for college preparatory high schools and college and the team noted a number of materials providing encouragement to students throughout the school, including materials on bulletin boards. The middle academy director reported that students were required to provide oral drills detailing their choice of a future high school and college and their reasons for their selection.

*Provide Structure and Order-*The school has a program in place in alignment with the Key Design Elements to provide structure and order to students in the school. Strong compliance was noted in the student body with dress code regulations and a common, strict discipline program was observed to be in place in classrooms across the school. Students were very familiar with this program and were largely in compliance. The behavior program included monitoring of behavior thorough "checks" in the elementary school and a demerit system in the middle school. Student behavior was

rigorously controlled in hallways where students were observed to comply well with in-line hallway transition procedures. Common classroom procedures were also observed by the team to be in place including the use of the Monroe Blackboard configuration model and common daily practices such as the problem of the day.

*Maintain a Small Community—and Communities—of Learners*-The elements in place at the school for this Key Design Element have been modified over time. Class sizes in some grades exceeded 20 students; however, frequently two teachers were providing instruction in these classrooms. Although the school is only one grade short of its full grade span, the school maintains a two house model, rather than the three house model identified in the Key Design Elements of the charter since this model appears to be effective for the school.

*Help Students until They Learn It*-The school provides a number of supports for students who need additional assistance. The program begins by keeping parents informed through calls home to parents, providing timely updates on student progress and interventions when students are struggling in their academics. After school tutoring and the Lifework program are provided for students who need additional assistance, and more intensive remediation is provided through the summer school program as necessary.

*Work Hard, Play Hard*-The school provides a number of athletic activities for its students during and after school. Fitness class is offered everyday for elementary students during school and optional afterschool fitness programs are available for middle school students. The middle school program includes the opportunity to participate on a basketball team.

*Involve Parents*-Expectations for parent involvement are clearly outlined in documents and contracts provided to parents when their child enrolls at the school. Items that promote parent involvement includes the requirement that parents pick up report cards at the school, parent programs to involve parents, and the presence of a parent member on the board. Information on the school's website shows the school has an active Family Involvement Committee that meets almost every month. The school also publishes a family handbook for each academy.

*Broaden the Community*-Students receive the ability to participate in community activities as rewards for solid homework compliance and good behavior. An example of an opportunity students have is the Big Brother program, which pairs older students with younger ones to provide support, both academic and otherwise.

## **Benchmark 2B: Parents and Students**

Parents and students were very satisfied with the school and its programs. The team met with students and parents in focus groups, and reviewed the 2009-2010 New York City school survey results. Students cited many positive aspects of the school: challenging coursework, many opportunities to explore beyond the school in activities such as field trips and summer programs, the basketball team, community meetings, and good teachers who cared about them and provided help when they needed it. They specifically cited being able to contact their teachers for help and tutoring. They stated that the rules were fair, and that they felt Excellence Boys was a safe school. The team observed care and concern by older students for the younger students who were in attendance at the focus groups.

Parents cited the leadership of the school's principal as pivotal in selecting the school. They also chose the school because it was academically challenging, and appreciated that it "opened a lot of doors" in programs like music, which were integrated into the school's schedule. One parent said these programs, "give my child great confidence." Another said that she felt the school would not give up on her

youngster; another gave examples of a teacher attending her child's sports activities to show interest and support. They all noted that from kindergarten through grade 7, the school helped the students to believe "that each boy will go to college." Information about the school, and their children's programs came through course syllabi in the middle school, newsletters, and frequent teacher communication at the elementary level. There was also an active parent organization, with a representative on the board. The board of trustee also included a parent member who enthusiastically participated in the board focus group.

The only recommendations for improvement that the parents suggested were to introduce a world language, and to lengthen the lunch period. As with the students, parents felt that Excellence Boys was a safe school. They noted that the work on helping students to learn about conflict resolution and the creed values were responsible for a positive school environment. They noted, "We are a village," and "all kids are treated equally." Parents were aware of the procedure for pursuing grievances and added that they all had resolved their issues at the teacher level. The interview with the parents mirrored the NYC Department of Education 2009-2010 school survey report. One hundred eighty-six parents (56 percent) completed the survey and rated the school high or highest in four categories: academic expectations (8.8 out of 10), communication (7.6 out of 10), engagement (7.6 out of 10), and safety and respect (8.3 out of 10).

Daily attendance at the school is high and was reported at 97 percent in the 2009-2010 annual report. The school maintains an active waiting list, but does not permit new enrollment after grade 2. The June 2009-June 2010 retention rate was reported in the 2009-2010 annual report as 96.7 percent.

## **Benchmark 2C: Organizational Capacity**

Excellence Boys is located in school district 16 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn in a former New York City public school, which it purchased, renovated, and moved to in 2006. According to information on the school's website, Excellence Boys is housed in a 90,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility with a 10,000-volume library, a 500-seat auditorium, music and art studios, a gymnasium, a climbing wall, a rooftop turf field, and sufficient classroom space to house Excellence Boys as it grows into a K-8 school.

Excellence Boys opened in August 2004 serving 90 students in kindergarten through grade 1. The school has added a grade each year since it opened and, at the time of the site visit had an enrollment of 430 students. The principal indicated the school will add grade 8 in school year 2011-2012 with anticipated enrollment increasing to 540 students. School leaders interviewed by the team stated that the school plans to add an additional kindergarten class each year until enrollment reaches 750 students, the approved charter enrollment. At that time each grade kindergarten through grade 8 will have three class sections.

At the beginning of school year 2009-2010, the school was reconfigured as two academies: a kindergarten through grade 4 elementary academy and a middle academy to serves grades 5 through 8. This reconfiguration was implemented in response to a growing need to focus on middle school issues such as increased expectations for students and teachers, grade 5 transitioning issues, and the need to provide more and earlier support during the school year for middle academy students and teachers. Examples of responses to these issues include assigning a grade level chair to grade 5 to focus on transitioning issues, providing specific support to middle academy literacy teachers, starting middle school tutorial sessions in September and delaying enrichment sessions until November, and



reorganizing teacher time so struggling teachers could maximize instructional time in the classroom. The principal recognizes some middle school teachers need additional support and he spends time in the classroom providing feedback and modeling classes.

The current partner of Excellence Boys is Uncommon Schools, a charter management organization that manages 12 schools in Brooklyn and 24 schools in New York City, New York State and New Jersey. Uncommon Schools has implemented a leadership model at Excellence Boys that allows the principal and academy directors to focus on teaching and learning issues such as assessment and instruction, while academy operations directors focus on school management issues such as transportation, budgeting, and purchasing. The model has clear lines of authority and responsibility. The principal and the academy directors are supported by a board of trustees, and the Managing Director of Brooklyn Uncommon Schools and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Uncommon Schools Leadership and Excellence Network. The school also employs a director of staff development and a dean of students.

According to documentation provided to the team, the school's academic personnel includes three kindergarten teachers and three kindergarten lead teachers, three grade 1 teachers and three grade 1 lead teachers, three grade 2 lead teachers, two grade two teachers, one grade 2 teaching assistant, three grade 3 lead teachers, one grade 4 teacher, two grade 4 lead teachers, two music teachers, three middle academy reading and writing teachers, a fine arts director, two fitness teachers, a learning support specialist, a librarian/reading teacher, a science specialist, a middle academy math and science teacher, a middle academy science teacher, a learning support coordinator, a middle academy history teacher, and a general middle academy teacher. In addition, the school has a principal, two academy directors, two academy operations directors, an elementary academy dean of students, and an elementary academy director of staff development. According to information provided to the team, all but one teacher at Excellence Boys was certified or awaiting certification and all had attained highly qualified status.

The principal has set expectations and standards with students, parents, and teachers to accomplish the mission and meet accountability plan goals. Accountability Plan goals have been identified and the leadership team and the board are familiar with these goals; however, teachers are not familiar with the Accountability Plan goals. The board reaffirmed in a focus group its familiarity with the accountability plan. The principal indicated that the board wants data presented at board meetings translated in a way that shows how it affects Accountability Plan goals. As a college preparatory school, the principal indicated he is focus totally on academics and the power of education for the students. He is working on reducing some the administrative responsibilities of teachers because he feels when teachers are at the school all conversations should be related to academics.

The school and Uncommon Schools collaborate on hiring teachers and other staff. The Uncommon Schools recruitment team recruits, screens resumes, and provides candidate information to the managing directors who refers appropriate candidates to the schools that have openings for consideration. A review of the principal's job description showed that he coordinates all recruitment efforts with the Uncommon Schools recruitment team, including interviewing candidates, observing candidates in a sample 45 minute lesson, checking references, and making offers. The principal is also responsible for firing teachers; information provided to the team showed only one teacher was not renewed last year and a mid-year staff evaluation process begins in January each year. In November of each year Uncommon Schools begins the process of projecting staff needs for the next year. Information provided to the team by interviewees showed that many beginning teachers struggle, but the school is looking for a good "cultural" fit and provides substantial professional development to support the teacher in teaching and instruction techniques.

Teacher turnover has been an issue at the school in the past and the principal stated it is a continuous process to discover and learn how to keep teachers. While student attrition has been negligible for the last five years, teacher attrition was 72 percent in 2005-2006, 20 percent in 2006-2007, 23 percent in 2007-2008, 22 percent in 2008-2009 and 31 percent in 2009-2010. Interviewees from Uncommon Schools stated that the teaching profession is changing and many teachers no longer stay in the profession for their entire career. Uncommon Schools has reviewed why teachers leave and have determined they are not, for the most part, losing teachers to other schools in New York City. They are working to stabilize teacher attrition at a reasonable percentage, which they feel is approximately 20 percent. Teacher compensation is approximately 15 percent higher than the New York City teachers' pay scale, and they also provide a substantial benefit package; however, the retirement options are not comparable to those available to NYC teachers. Uncommon Schools has also collaborated with two other charter management organizations and Hunter College to create Teacher U. The teachers who enroll in this two year program receiving a preliminary teaching license and graduate with a Masters in Teaching.

The primary method of recruiting students is through a lottery, which the school holds each April. The Uncommon Schools COO indicated that the school received approximately 1300 lottery applications for its schools. A review of board minutes indicated the school had 360 applications for the 87 students accepted for school year 2010-2011. Sixty-nine were accepted from the lottery, eight were accepted as siblings, and eight were selected from the waitlist, according to information provided by the school during the site visit. The school provides an admission preference for siblings and for students who live within the school district. The school manages and pays for the cost of the lottery. The COO estimated the cost of advertising at \$5-6,000 dollars. The school and Uncommon Schools have reviewed the sources of applications in an effort to target the marketing effort.

The school's management and board communicate with parents, school staff, and students. The school publishes elementary and middle academy family handbooks, which both include information on issues related to students and parents, including a code of conduct, a description of the freedom of information requirements, and a formal complaint policy. According to information on the school's website, the school has a Family Involvement Committee, which meets at least monthly. Examples of these meetings include the middle academy back to school nigh and the elementary academy literacy night.

## **Benchmark 2D: Board Oversight**

The school and Uncommon Schools each have a board of trustees. According to the school's by-laws provided to the team, the number of trustees shall be not less than five or more than 25. The powers of the board are described in the by-laws. Examples of specific powers include electing and removing trustees; borrowing money and incurring debt; carrying out the business of the charter school; and indemnifying and maintaining insurance.

Excellence Boys membership includes 18 trustees and has approved by-laws. The by-laws include articles which describe a process for election, eligibility, term of office, removal, resignation, vacancies, and compensation. The board members interviewed indicated the board uses several methods to fill vacancies, including board search services, such as one provided by the Robin Hood Foundation. The board policy manual included a section on trustee qualifications and trustee recruitment. Having this policy shows the board recognizes that they are ultimately responsible for ensuring the school meets the mission of preparing students to excel in high school and college as serve their communities as leaders, and need to have policies in place that ensure board members are qualified to serve.

Nine members of the board were available to be interviewed by the team-six in person at the school and three via conference call. Board membership included a parent representative, who also attended the board focus group. In terms of the skills prospective members need to bring to the board, board members interviewed were looking for candidates with expertise in education, finance, law, accounting, and fundraising and recruited successfully individuals with those skills. A review of the backgrounds of board members showed members had the appropriate expertise to govern the school, including experience in law, fundraising, management, and finance.

The board members interviewed understood the mission and core business of the school and indicated that they received packets of student achievement data prior to each board meeting and that they are presented packages of information, including information on student achievement, finance, interim assessments, student attrition, and various operational data. At every board meeting they always try to discuss a problem facing the school. For example, at the April 21, 2010 board meeting, the principal discussed the results of the most recent STEP assessment. At the December 1, 2009 meeting the principal discussed the increase in teacher observations by academy directors and the director of staff development and noted this as a positive change for the year.

The board has not made any financial or organizational decisions that have impeded the school in meeting its mission. The board did indicate to the evaluation team that it decided to spend more resources on the school's library than originally planned by Uncommon Schools. The interview with the board was held in the school's library and it was well provisioned and rivaled the children's section of many community libraries. The team was provided information that showed the school was not self-sustaining based on enrollment, and is required each year to raise approximately \$500,000 from outside sources to support all school services. The managing director and board members indicated finances were monitored closely, and the team confirmed through a review of a sample of board minutes that financials were presented and discussed at board meetings. School academic and operations leaders are involved in the budget process and collaborate with budget staff from Uncommon Schools to develop the annual budget. Monthly meetings are also held with Uncommon Schools to discuss the school budget and spending.


The board members interviewed indicated the board has not evaluated the principal in writing, although the managing director does work closely with the principal and provides the board with feedback on her performance. The board has not conducted a self-evaluation. Uncommon Schools asks school leaders to submit an evaluation of its performance, followed by a self-evaluation by Uncommon Schools. Results are provided to the board.

## **Benchmark 2E: Governance**

The board has developed and approved the mission and academic goals included in the school's Accountability Plan. Board members indicated that a system is in place to assure that Accountability Plan goals are met. The board relies on the managing director and chief operating officer of Uncommon Schools, in collaboration with the principal of the school, to implement and monitor systems to meet school goals and priorities.

The board policy manual included a section on trustee recruitment, and the by-laws include procedures for electing new board members and procedures for elections, removals, and filling of vacancies.





School and board policies are in place. School policies for students and parents are outlined in the elementary and middle academy handbooks; board policies are reflected in the by-laws and board policy manual; and teacher policies are outlined in the teacher handbook.

According to a review of the by-laws and the policy manual, the board holds bi-monthly meetings or at least five times a year, but usually not in July or August. Meetings of Uncommon Schools' schools are usually held on the same day on a rotating basis among the schools. A review of a sample of Board minutes showed meeting were held at Excellence Girls, Excellence Boys, and Uncommon Charter High School in 2009-2010. The by-laws allow the meetings to be held at the corporation's principal office or at any other place designated by the board. The board adheres to the New York State public meeting law, and a description of the open meeting policy is included in the board policy manual, which states "Excellence is a "public body" and is required to comply with the New York Open Meeting Law. All board meetings are open to the public and written minutes, including a record of the votes of individual trustees, are available to the public on request."

According to board members interviewed, board members can hold dual membership on the Uncommon Schools and the Excellence Boys boards. According to board members interviewed, no more than two members can sit on both boards. The team was provided a four page conflict of interest policy that included seven articles, including articles on procedures for addressing conflicts of interest, determining whether a conflict of interest exists, the duty to disclose, and violations of the conflict of interest policy.

Board members indicated a grievance process was in place at the school, and the team observed a complaint policy was included in the elementary and middle academy handbooks. A review of the academy handbooks showed that they included a section entitled "Addressing Concerns," which outlined the procedures to follow if there was a concern about school policy or a complaint against the school for violating state law or the school's charter. A review of these procedures showed that the board and all staff were accessible as part of the complaint process.

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## METHODOLOGY

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The two-day site visit was conducted at Excellence during the period on November 16 and 17, 2010. The inspection team (the team) conducted interviews with the principal, managing director and the chief operating officer of Uncommon Schools, the elementary and middle academy academic and operations directors, the staff development director, the special education coordinator and a special education teacher. The team used a portion of the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks to guide the evaluation process.

In addition, the team conducted the following focus groups of school community representatives:

- A board of trustees' interview consisting of nine current members.
- A teacher focus group consisting of seven teachers.
- A student focus group consisting of ten students representing grades K-6.
- A parent focus group consisting of seven parents.

The team conducted 23 classroom observations in grades K through 7. The observations ranged in length from 20 to 30 minutes. Fourteen ELA lessons, five mathematics lessons, two science lessons, one social studies lesson, and one music lesson were observed. Team members kept running records of their observations using a classroom observation evidence worksheet.

The documents and data reviewed by the team before, during, and after the site visit included the following:

- Organization Chart
- School Improvement or Strategic Plan
- List and calendar of formative and summative assessments
- Copies of data analyses and summaries
- Description of student support programs
- Student and Family handbooks
- Faculty and Staff handbooks
- Professional development program documents, schedules, and course lists
- Board minutes and bylaws
- Teacher Planning time and meeting schedules
- Teacher evaluation tools
- Classroom observation tools
- Job descriptions of school leaders and instructional staff
- School classroom schedules and map
- Teacher roster and certification, including highly qualified status
- Parent surveys and newsletters
- School data to include waiting list, enrollment, student teacher and attrition data
- Sample lesson plans
- Sample student work
- Sample evaluations of teachers, school leaders, and management organizations
- Curriculum documents

The external school evaluation was conducted by an experienced team of educators from Class Measures. Their biographies follow:

**Christine Brandt** has served as a classroom teacher, special educator, administrator, and principal. She began her career as a Middle School teacher of English, French, Moderate Special Needs, and Reading. She moved into the administrator ranks as a Special Education Director at the Middle School level. For 18 years she served as principal in Wellesley and Dover, Massachusetts. In addition, she worked with the Somerville Charter School as their Lower School Coordinator. Currently, she mentors and supervises aspiring school administrators in both regular and special education. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association and is their Federal Liaison and Legislative Chair. She earned her undergraduate degree from Regis College, and her graduate degrees from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell in Reading and Learning Disabilities and from Northeastern University in Education Administration.

**Jeanne Simons, Director of Educational Development.** She worked previously as a high school mathematics teacher and in mathematics reform in urban school districts as a Targeted Mathematics Specialist with the Massachusetts Department of Education. She is a content and pedagogical expert in mathematics. She has experience in the development of coaching programs, effective differentiation, assessment and the formative usage of data, and in developing and providing professional development for teachers and leaders across a variety of reform topics. In addition, she has been involved in the development of a variety of technology-based educational initiatives, most recently providing educational support in the development of one of the first online teacher licensure programs in the Middle East. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the California Institute of Technology and a Masters of Education in Mind, Brain and Education from Harvard.

**James Hearn, Vice President of Professional Services** Jim is the Vice President of Professional Services for Class Measures. In that capacity, he manages the Class Measures school evaluation process and all contracts, participates as a team member on site visits, and edits and writes evaluation reports. Jim has over twenty-five years of experience in state government policy and budget analysis, performance auditing, program evaluation, and University teaching. Jim served as a School District Examiner and Field Coordinator for the Massachusetts Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, completing over forty school and district reviews in Massachusetts. For almost a decade, Jim held the position of Senior Policy Analyst for the Senate Post Audit and Oversight Committee of the Massachusetts State Senate. In that capacity, he completed a number of performance audits and policy reviews, including a comprehensive review of the Massachusetts adult correctional education programs. Jim is a former member of the Executive Committee of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society. From 1982 to 1996, he served as an Adjunct Lecturer in Health Management at University College at Northeastern University. Jim earned his Bachelors Degree in Business from Boston College and holds a Master's Degree in Business from Suffolk University.

**Melanie Gallo** has been an educator for 35 years. A member of the National School Reform faculty, she has been a teacher and a school director. She has been a founder of two schools: a school in New Hampshire and a charter school in Massachusetts. She has been recognized by the College Board for excellence in teaching AP English and is the author of Senior Project in Creating the Good High School by Mackin/Silva. She is a trained Critical Friends coach and has served on the Board of the Massachusetts Drama Guild. She is currently on the graduate school adjunct faculty at Fitchburg State College. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Master's degree in Education from Fitchburg State College. She is at present a Leadership Consultant for Class Measures.