



Charter Schools Institute *The State University of New York*

Excellence Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant

Third-Year Inspection Report

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

This report is organized in the following sections:

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

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

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

The "Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School's Academic Success" is further divided into two components: the "School Performance Review," which provides an analysis of student academic performance for the most recent two years as an indication of the school's academic

success (Renewal Benchmark 1.A), and the “School Educational Program Review,” which reflects the visit team’s analysis of the qualitative aspects of the school’s educational program based upon the guiding questions provided by the Institute and aligned with Renewal Benchmarks 1.B – 1.F. “Benchmark Analysis and Evidence of the School’s Organizational Viability,” focuses on three components: clarity of the school’s mission and vision to its stakeholders; parent and student satisfaction; and the establishment of systems to monitor the effectiveness of the school’s instructional program. Renewal Benchmarks 2.B., 2.D.1, and 2.C.1 provide the underpinnings for this part of the report.

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

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

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

II. CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

The inspection of the Excellence Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant was conducted on April 18 and 19, 2007, by an independent team of experienced educators from Class Measures, Stoneham, Massachusetts. The team included:

Melanie Gallo is a former charter school founder and principal and has extensive classroom experience in urban school settings. Melanie has led charter school inspections in Massachusetts and in New York State. Melanie chaired the visit and authored the report.

Peter Davies is President of Class Measures. He is a former British School Inspector who has worked in school and district accountability for more than ten years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Middle East. He trains reviewers for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability in Massachusetts.

Marcia Anselmo is a former elementary school principal, with extensive experience of education in urban settings. In her last post she led her school to become the highest achieving in the city of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Marcia is an instruction and curriculum specialist with a special interest in reading and group work.

Andrea DeMeo is a former elementary teacher with particular experience working with gifted and talented students in urban settings. Andrea is part of Class Measures Teacher Quality Team, and brings experience in observing instructional practice.

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

III. SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York originally approved the application for Excellence Charter School of Bedford Stuyvesant ("Excellence Charter School"), formerly named Bedford Stuyvesant Preparatory Charter School for Excellence, on February 25, 2003. The charter was then approved by operation of law on June 20, 2003. The school used the 2003-04 school year as a planning year, opening in August of 2004 at 600 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, New York serving 90 all-male students in Kindergarten through first grades. The school added second grade in the 2005-06 school year, serving 135 students, and then added third grade in the 2006-07 school year for a total enrollment of 177 students. Excellence Charter School plans to continue growing one grade at a time until it reaches an enrollment of 329 students in Kindergarten through fifth grades by the 2008-09 school year, the last year of its current charter. Ultimately, the school would like to serve students through the eighth grade. In June of 2006, Excellence Charter School moved to a new facility located at 225 Patchen Avenue in Brooklyn, New York.

The mission statement for Excellence Charter School is as follows:

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.

According to the Executive Summary in its initial application, the school's founders were inspired by an after-school program called "Bedford Stuyvesant I Have a Dream." This program challenges students to dream about college and to live that dream. Noting that an after-school program can only minimally address the challenges students face, the founders decided to plan a charter school. The educational program is based on the belief that providing a rigorous academic program (adapted from the programs of successful urban charter schools in New York City and around the country) to children from the earliest elementary grades forward is the best way to ensure high academic

achievement. The charter states that Excellence Charter School will achieve its mission through the following central elements of the school:

- a culture that expects excellence;
- small class sizes;
- a focus on literacy;
- assigned homework beginning in Kindergarten;
- the involvement of parents;
- extended day and year;
- sharing “Core Knowledge”;
- recruitment of top teachers;
- assessment early and often to drive instruction;
- school uniforms; and
- character development and a community of learners.

At full capacity the school would be divided into three houses: the primary academy (grades Kindergarten to two), the elementary academy (grades three to five), and the middle academy (grades six to eight).

The founders chose to begin an all-boys school because they believed that this would have the unique and important effect of focusing all of the school’s attention on what it deems to be the most at-risk population in Bedford Stuyvesant, low-income African-American and Latino boys. The application pointed out that there is strong evidence suggesting that a single-sex environment may have a very positive effect on the teaching of boys, especially boys that fit this demographic profile, and that a single-sex environment promises academic benefits not possible in a co-educational setting. The application also noted that while there is an all-girls school located in Harlem, there were no other all-boys public schools in New York City.

On September 26, 2006 the State University Trustees approved the school’s request to add Uncommon Schools, Inc. (“USI”) as its not-for-profit management partner, a request subsequently approved by the Board of Regents on December 5, 2006. Specifically, the Business Services Agreement between the school and USI states that USI will provide the following services to the school:

- Comprehensive program design, including curriculum development and implementation, and instructional oversight;
- The development, administration, and analysis of diagnostic assessments, and the oversight, measurement, and management of school quality;
- Coordination of facility financing and repair;
- Fundraising;
- Staff recruitment;
- Principal training and evaluation;
- Professional development;
- Budget services and monthly financial statements;
- Payroll and bookkeeping services, including serving as the liaison with general auditors;

- Human resources services;
- Facilitating the school's purchase and procurement of information technology equipment and services, and providing certain computer and information technology support to the school, including troubleshooting, website and network design, and completion of the E-Rate application;
- Completing required foundation and government reports, including, but not limited to, the school's annual report;
- Facilitating student recruitment;
- Providing marketing and advocacy services; and
- Conducting a school accountability inspection every two years.

School Year (2006-07)

189 instructional days

School Day (2006-07)

7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.¹ (Monday - Thursday)

7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. (Friday)

¹ Reflects a reduction in the length of the school day from what was outlined in the original charter (7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.). The school's previously mandatory after-school program was made optional.

Enrollment

	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ²	Original Chartered Grades	Revised Grades Served	Actual Grades Served	Complying
2003-04	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	NA
2004-05	88	88	90	K-1	K-1	K-1	YES
2005-06	152	152	135	K-2	K-2	K-2	YES
2006-07	214	175	177	K-3	K-3	K-3	YES
2007-08	273	273		K-4	K-4		
2008-09	329	329		K-5	K-5		

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
Race/Ethnicity	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Black (Not Hispanic)	88	97.8%	135	100.0%
Hispanic	2	2.2%	0	0.0%
White	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

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

² Actual enrollment from the Institute's Official Enrollment Table. Note that the NYSED 2004-05 School Report Card, upon which the Free and Reduced lunch figures are calculated, cited the same enrollment of 90 students for 2004-05. The NYSED 2005-06 database similarly cited an enrollment of 135 students.

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
Free/Reduced Lunch	No. of Students	% of Enroll.	No. of Students	% of Enroll.
Eligible for Free Lunch	36	40.0%	55	40.7%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	20	22.2%	21	15.6%

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

School Charter History

Charter Year	School Year	Year of Operation	Evaluation Visit	Feedback to School	Other Actions Taken
Original Charter – 1 st Year	2003-04	Planning Year	NO	NA	Name Change Approved
Original Charter – 2 nd Year	2004-05	1 st	YES	Prior Action Letter, End-of-Year Evaluation Letter	
Original Charter – 3 rd Year	2005-06	2 nd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	School Moved to New Facility
Original Charter – 4 th Year	2006-07	3 rd	YES	End-of-Year Evaluation Report	Management Partner Request Approved

IV. SCHOOL EVALUATION

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

A. School Performance Review (2005-2006)

Performance Summary	As the school only served students in grades K-2 during the 2005-06 school year, it did not have state test results. Only one Accountability Plan measure was applicable during this year: the value added measure. The school met this measure in mathematics but not in ELA. Limited evidence from Terra Nova and DIBELS tests suggests the school has laid a foundation upon which to build towards achieving its goals in ELA and mathematics. The school did not report on science or social studies performance, nor did it report its NCLB status.
English Language Arts	On the value added measure in the school's Accountability Plan, neither of the two cohorts achieved their targets on the Terra Nova. The average NCE for 1 st grade was approximately 60 for both reading and language, a decrease from the previous year. The average NCE for 2 nd grade was 55 in reading and 61 in language, about the same as the previous year in both areas. Despite the absence of cohort gains, the percentage of students at each grade was well above grade level. According to the school's report, 60 percent of Kindergarten students performed at or above grade level in reading and 81 percent in language. For 1 st grade students, 74 percent achieved grade level in both reading and language. 62 percent of 2 nd grade students were at or above grade level in reading and 76 percent in language. The school also reported strong performance by 1 st and 2 nd grade students on the DIBELS.
Mathematics	On the value added measure both cohorts achieved their targets on the Terra Nova. The average NCE was 66 for 1 st grade and 68 for 2 nd grade; both grades increased their average NCE from the previous year. Both 1 st and 2 nd grade improved over the previous year with 74 percent of 1 st grade students and 94 percent of 2 nd grade students finishing the year at or above grade level.
Science	No state testing grades this year and no other results reported.
Social Studies	No state testing grades this year and no other results reported.
NCLB	Data unavailable.
Additional Goals (optional)	Under the parent and student satisfaction goal, the response rate on the parent survey was too small to determine parent satisfaction; however, the re-enrollment rate and daily attendance rate were both 96 percent. The school also reported meeting both its legal compliance and fiscal soundness goals.

B. School Educational Program Review

Benchmark 1B: The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.

Excellence Charter School has in place the regular administration of assessments. The school tests all students in K – 3rd grades using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS), a standardized individualized measure of early literacy. This test is given in September, December, and June for 1st – 3rd grades, and only in June for students in kindergarten. Harcourt's Early Reading Success Indicator (ERSI), a standardized test designed to assess learning process difficulties to improve early reading skills, is given to all Kindergarten students in the summer before they enter school and again in October, December, and June. The TerraNova, a norm-referenced, standardized achievement test of basic skills, is administered to Kindergarten students in January and June and to students in 1st – 3rd grades in June. The 2006-07 school year was the first year that Excellence Charter School students were eligible to take the New York State tests; the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics tests were administered to 3rd grade students. Teachers also regularly assess students using the Saxon mathematics unit assessments.

In addition to these external assessments, Excellence Charter School uses Datawise Inc., an assessment management system that allows teachers and school leaders to create assessments that are aligned to the New York State standards and the school's curriculum. They are used to create interim assessments in mathematics and English language arts given to 1st – 3rd grade students three times a year. In addition, all students in Kindergarten through third grades are given a baseline composition in September. The bimonthly composition is administered again in November, February, May, and June. The school leadership team systematically collects data from these assessments and discusses results at weekly leadership meetings, where the team looks for trends and targets goals students must meet in order for the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.

Teachers also develop assessments in core areas such as phonics, sentence completion, inference, main idea, and similar early reading skills. These assessments are used approximately every two months. The results are then used to formulate the needs of the students for further teaching. After assessments, the teacher analyses are focused on three areas: standards analysis, chief challenge (i.e., why students did not learn a particular point), and instructional plan (i.e., how to re-teach the non-mastered standards).

The leadership uses assessment data to identify professional development needs of teachers, as evidenced in the school's Professional Development Plan. For example, a portion of the needs assessment in the 2006-2008 Professional Development Plan cited the school's 2004-05 and 2005-06 TerraNova scores as well as its performance on the 2005-2006 Saxon mathematics assessment as the basis for the determination that teachers need to continue to improve their ability to use questioning to deepen students' conceptual understanding of mathematics procedures. Professional development in this area will also assist teachers in helping students reach the school's Accountability Plan goal that students enrolled in at least their second year will meet or exceed New York State elementary learning standards in mathematics.

In interviews the board and the leadership team shared an example of a significant curriculum change that was made in the 2005-2006 school year as a result of the school's analysis of assessment results. In response to inadequate progress shown by English language arts assessments, the school replaced

the Open Court series then in use with Reading Mastery. They also reported that assessment data since that change has supported the decision to revise the English language arts curriculum.

In focus group interviews, teachers indicated that they were aware of the Accountability Plan goals for their students' performance and that they use assessment data to develop and improve the curriculum. One teacher stated that backward design, starting from the assessments, was part of the curriculum development process. Another stated that satisfactory performance was deemed to be 80 percent of students' achieving mastery. Falling short of this goal meant re-teaching, reviewing and reassessing students. Teachers told the team that they reflected every day on what their students had or had not mastered and that on Fridays, during professional development time, they reviewed student work and used inquiry group discussions to address problems and issues relating to student achievement. They said that they also used assessment data to make referrals to the reading and mathematics specialists, as well as to the special education coordinator, and to identify students for participation in Saturday school, a program designed to prepare 3rd grade students for the New York State tests.

Excellence Charter School administrators and teachers share a common understanding of the meaning and consequences of assessment results. The leadership and teaching staff stated that assessment results are used to inform curriculum development, as well as re-teaching and academic tutoring efforts. Members of the board of trustees told the school visit team that the school administers frequent assessments in order to gather baseline data that will inform instruction. They said that they review assessment data regularly and that any deviation from the established baseline would require modification of instruction. The leadership stated that closing the achievement gap is the school's urgent mission and that assessment data is important information in that work. Teachers interviewed said that the use of assessment data is an important part of their curriculum development work at Excellence Charter School.

As stated in the Family Handbook, Excellence Charter School shares assessment results with families through report cards that are distributed four times each year. Parents and teachers stated in interviews with the team that report cards are not sent home; instead, parents are required to meet with their son's teacher to receive his report card. Parents who fail to set up an appointment are called. In addition to the report cards, results are also shared at each board meeting in a document called the Performance Dashboard.

Benchmark 1C: The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.

Excellence Charter School has clearly defined the knowledge and skills that all students in Kindergarten through third grades are expected to achieve. The reading curriculum uses a variety of approaches and materials. *SRA Reading Mastery*, a direct instruction reading program based on phonics is used, as is *Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading*, which uses authentic texts in leveled readers. The school also uses Isabel Beck's *Text Talk*, a read-aloud program that helps to develop vocabulary and comprehension.

The school engages Urban Education Exchange (UEE), a nonprofit research group working with a number of school systems in New York and elsewhere, to help teachers plan Guided Reading lessons. According to the director of curriculum and instruction, UEE visits the school approximately six times per year. UEE's basic role is to match key areas in the school's

reading/English language arts curriculum with the state standards and to develop lessons with grade level benchmarks.

The UEE curriculum services generally provide only the anchor lessons in reading/English language arts, while teachers supplement the provided scope and sequence and anchor lessons with lesson plans that are more detailed in nature. The director of curriculum and instruction stated in an interview that in order to develop a full teaching program, classroom teachers must take the anchor lesson and fit it to the needs of the students in each classroom in collaboration with the school-wide texts.

In Kindergarten and 1st grades, Excellence Charter School uses *Waterford Form* from the Waterford Institute, a computer program with high level graphics and music that allows students to work independently through skill areas while reinforcing phonics, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary.

The school's writing instruction uses the writers' workshop model from Lucy Calkins. This program consists of mini-lessons, independent writing time, teacher conferencing, and sharing with peers and the teacher.

For penmanship, the school teaches letter formation that is part of the Handwriting Without Tears program. This program also includes fine motor strategies. The teaching of cursive begins in the second half of 3rd grade; the school has no formal cursive program at this time.

The school's mathematics curriculum uses the Saxon mathematics text, which provides consistent mathematics instruction incorporating daily mixed practice, language, and hands-on manipulative use.

The school's social studies and science curricula use Core Knowledge, based on the program by E.D. Hirsch. Teachers use FOSS and DELTA teaching kits to enhance the curriculum in science and social studies.

The school visit team determined that both the English language arts and mathematics programs are fully developed. According to teachers interviewed by the team, the science and social studies programs are works in progress; summer work will be dedicated to further development of these programs.

Finally, the school's character education program uses the violence prevention curriculum developed by Second Step Committee for Children as well as the Hartwood series *Teaching Values Through Books*.

Excellence Charter School teachers are fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible and have timely access to guidelines for developing lesson plans. In September of each year, teachers meet to review the specific standards for each grade and to preview the end-of-year goals. Teachers have weekly lesson plans as well as subject area lesson plans. All planning is available online. As demonstrated to the team by the director of curriculum and instruction, each class has a folder online containing all weekly and subject area lesson plans that can be viewed by anyone in the school. Reading plans are clearly noted by a column indicating the correlated standards. All teachers interviewed by the team stated that they were fully aware of the curricula for which they were responsible.

The school has implemented an organized and cohesive program in Kindergarten through 3rd grades. The school has two binders, one for K-1st grades and the other for 2nd – 3rd grades which contain all the anchor lessons and approximate pacing charts. The teachers have access to curriculum binders and pacing charts in the core subject areas. The standards referenced in the binders are the school's, although the English language arts materials also reference New York State's. When asked about this distinction, the school's managing director stated that the school's standards are based on the New York State standards but were designed to be more rigorous. Teachers interviewed by the team confirmed this statement. The classroom observations conducted by the team and the more than 60 lesson plans reviewed referenced daily aims or objectives that corroborated this as well. The team also reviewed over 150 pieces of student work from K – 3rd grades that demonstrated that the school's curriculum is being taught as written.

1D.1: The school has strong instructional leadership.

The team found strong instructional leadership at Excellence Charter School. The school has a clear organization chart that outlines the school's leadership structure. The leadership group interviewed by the team included the managing director from Uncommon Schools, the principal, the director of operations, and the director of curriculum and instruction. The team learned that the school's leadership has set priorities that are consistent with the school's academic Accountability Plan goals.

The school leadership has developed a common language that refers to students as scholars. Each classroom is named after a college, and college banners hang in the classrooms. The eight students interviewed by the team were all able to say where they planned to attend college, and the parents interviewed stated that talking about attending college was a part of their conversations with their children.

This common language is coupled with high expectations for each member of the Excellence Charter School community. The leadership group told the school visit team that they are working to build a culture of reflection and to improve instruction in order to help students achieve academic excellence. All stakeholders in the focus groups interviewed by the team emphasized their awareness of, and commitment to, academic excellence at Excellence Charter School. The principal told the team that the school has rigorous academics balanced with high expectations for behavior and that both are integrated with the "J factor," the school's reference to the joy in learning.

The team confirmed that the school's leadership has focused on developing students' core academic skills with an emphasis on literacy and mathematics. The school employs a reading specialist and a mathematics specialist to support staff in both of these critical areas. The school's Accountability Plan states that Excellence Charter School students in the third grade or higher and who are enrolled in at least their second year will meet or exceed *New York State Elementary Learning Standards in English Language Arts*. To that end, the leadership team has created a schedule that includes nearly three hours of literacy education each day. In addition, the leadership has required parents to read with their sons each day for 20 minutes. Parents interviewed said this is a commitment that they take seriously.

The leadership has also focused on meeting the Accountability Plan goals for mathematics: for example, the Accountability Plan states that students in the third grade or higher and who are enrolled in at least their second year will meet or exceed *New York State Elementary Standards in*

Mathematics. Mathematics instruction is scheduled for two periods a day; students also solve the mathematics problem of the day and write about mathematics.

Excellence Charter School has in place a comprehensive and ongoing system for evaluating teacher effectiveness and quality. Teachers receive formal training in the evaluation system during the summer professional development program for teachers. Both the principal and the director of curriculum and instruction participate in the evaluation system, which is based on observation, feedback, and reflection. A face-to-face conversation is held with the teacher on the day that the teacher is observed. In the first quarter of the school year, each teacher is given a two- or three-page narrative that focuses on instructional strategies, behavior management, and specific curriculum areas. The narrative addresses the teacher's strengths as well as areas for growth; it also assesses the teacher's professional conduct and relationships with a variety of school constituencies. The team reviewed the school's folder of completed narratives and found the feedback given to teachers to be detailed and specific as to how to develop professional practice.

Later in the year, each teacher is given a six- to ten-page formal evaluation that is rubric-based, with scores ranging from 4 for "Advanced" to 1 for "Needs Development." The evaluation addresses 15 standards and more than 90 sub-standards. The teacher adds reflections on his or her practice to this document and then meets with the principal to discuss the evaluation and ratings. The team reviewed the completed evaluations as well as the teacher reflections and found them to be quite comprehensive.

Teachers interviewed in both the second- and third-grade focus groups said that the teacher evaluation process in place at the school was positive and constructive. Teachers stated that school leaders and other teachers popped in and out of rooms frequently and that they were comfortable with the model. Teachers and school leaders also told the team that the school maintains an open-door policy enabling teachers to seek support from any member of the leadership team. The team observed a culture of collaboration at Excellence Charter School that encourages teachers to learn from each other.

According to the school's leadership, staffing decisions are driven by the school's evaluation system. In interviews with the visit team, the leadership emphasized the importance of ensuring that the right people are in place to do the urgent and hard work that the school has undertaken. The principal stated that he is not afraid to have hard conversations with people who were not meeting the school's expectations for excellence and that the school looks for teachers who embody high expectations and rigor. The principal's statements are borne out by the fact that eight teachers, or 50 percent of the teaching staff, were not invited to return to the school in the 2006-07 school year.

Excellence Charter School has a system in place to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. According to the managing director, the school relies on its charter management organization, Uncommon Schools, Inc. (USI) to recruit school staff. The Uncommon Schools management organization has a three-member group that taps a broad network of colleges and programs such as Teach for America to generate a pool of qualified candidates. USI reviews resumes and screens candidates by telephone before referring candidates to the principal for a telephone interview. Candidates are then invited to teach a sample lesson and are given a follow-up interview. The school then asks finalists to provide transcripts, references, and a writing sample. Currently, USI is working with Hunter College to develop a teacher university program that will train teacher candidates to work in Uncommon Schools. Uncommon Schools is hopeful that this program will attract candidates

from the New York area who are committed to staying in the area and, thus, will reduce the school's high turnover rate of teachers who move out of state.

In sum, the team found that the Excellence Charter School leadership effectively supports the school's instructional program and has established an environment of high expectations that includes high expectations for the leadership group itself. Interviews with the leadership and teachers show that the school leaders are committed, hardworking, and passionate about the goals that they have set for the school.

Benchmark 1D.2: High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.

The team visited 14 classrooms during the site visit. The classrooms observed included three kindergarten classes, six first-grade classes, two second-grade classes, and three third-grade classes. The lesson observations each lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. In all but one classroom there were two teachers present some or all of the time. In six classrooms, the second teacher shared the teaching, effectively dividing the class, or instructing a subgroup. In two classrooms, the second teacher took responsibility for a student or students requiring special attention. In five classrooms the second teacher was engaged in other tasks and not directly engaged with instruction. The team assessed the quality of instruction directly in relation to the six instructional indicators under Benchmark 1D.2 of the QEBs. About half of the team's classroom observations were followed by individual interviews of the teachers observed.

Excellence Charter School staffs each classroom in K-2nd grades with two teachers: a lead teacher with at least two years of teaching experience and a teacher who is less experienced. According to school documentation reviewed by the team, all seven lead teachers at Excellence Charter School are certified and highly qualified under NCLB. Of the eight less-experienced teachers, three are certified and one is both certified and highly qualified.

The large majority of teachers observed by the team demonstrated appropriate competency in teaching the subject matter at grade level. However, the team observed two cases where teachers gave the sort of misleading instructions that can establish poor performance habits. One example was when students were being introduced to scientific recording and were invited to draw specimens from memory and also given the choice to write figuratively if they wished. The other example was in the teaching of mathematical subtraction, which neither underscored nor referenced the algorithmic process conceptually. These practices are notable when subject teachers are not highly qualified and/or are not specialists in the area being taught. It is likely to become more of an issue as the school grows into the older grades, demanding deeper subject knowledge, unless a curriculum-led staffing model is adopted.

In nine of the 14 classrooms observed, the team saw clear evidence of a standards-based curriculum, although the connection to the state performance standards was not explicit in any of the classes. The team found that all lessons observed on the days of the visit were focused on specific learning objectives; again, the alignment to state performance standards was not explicit. In nine classrooms, the team observed that either the objective or the aim for the day was posted for students. Teachers in four classrooms also repeated the objectives of the day for their students. In follow-up interviews, teachers were able to state the specific performance standard addressed by the lesson observed; they also gave examples of how the learning needs of individual students were being met during the observed lesson. Teachers explained to the school visit team how they used the interim summative

assessments to track individual student progress and create student groupings for differentiation and remediation. In response to the team's questions, teachers were able to discuss the achievement status and rate of progress of individual students.

In five of the 14 classrooms observed by the team, not all students were engaged in focused, purposeful activities. The team estimated that approximately 25 percent of the students in these classrooms were not engaged in their lessons at any one time. In one classroom, only a few students were observed to be engaged in their lessons. In all five lessons, the problem of student disengagement was exacerbated by the teachers' efforts to redirect students who were not paying attention, during which time other students appeared to lose focus. In these cases, the teachers' attempts to redirect frequently interrupted the instruction but only infrequently resulted in efficient classroom management to meet the needs of all students. In the other nine lessons, however, all students were engaged in focused, purposeful activities most of the time. The classrooms where students were most engaged were those where there were two teachers present and where the teachers had made thoughtful arrangements about small group work or where students were engaged in activities that required them to learn together in a collaborative way.

The school has an acronym for classroom behavior: S.T.A.R. The S.T.A.R. expectations, which were posted in every classroom, are as follows: Sit up, students are expected to sit up in an alert posture (when they are on the rug that means legs should be crossed and hands should be folded in their lap); Track the speaker with your eyes, meant to focus attention and show respect; Ask and answer questions (students are expected to be on task 100% of the time); and Respect at all times, students should show respect for peers and teachers at all times. The team saw these rules in use in each classroom visited. Students were reminded of them throughout the lessons observed. In the student focus group conducted by the team, the eight students interviewed stated that their teachers were strict because they wanted them to learn. When asked about classroom rules, they all cited the S.T.A.R. principles.

All classrooms visited had extensive displays on the walls that were appropriate for subject area and grade levels, for example, poems, displays about ways to talk about books and characters, and displays about the writing process were posted on bulletin boards. Student work was displayed prominently in all classrooms visited and posted on hallway walls throughout the school. The team also saw evidence of challenging and impressive project work in art and science, and the projects appeared designed to further students' broader understanding and cultural development. The team reviewed over 150 samples of student work, including many writing samples, and found that the assignments given for this work were creative and challenging. Common rubrics were in use for writing assignments.

In all but six of the 14 classes observed, instruction was delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson. The classrooms observed by the team were primarily teacher-centered. The expectations for what students need to know were clearly articulated and reinforced in these classrooms; teachers made reference to lessons that had come before and expected students to articulate relevant concepts from prior learning. The team saw many examples of students responding positively.

In six classrooms, however, expectations were not clearly set and reinforced. The team saw several cases in which students were redirected to the substance of the lesson but were then allowed to remain off-task without consequence. In one classroom, one boy repeatedly returned to reading a

book during mathematics instruction. The team observed that in some cases, behavior expectations were not met because they were unrealistic. For example, primary-grade students were asked to place papers to which they were referring on their knees without touching them. Classroom management that includes such expectations reflects the limited experience of the faculty, as discussed below. In other cases, students were observed to be restless and disinclined to try to engage in the work despite teachers' repeated instructions. Again, teachers' failure to use alternative strategies, rather than repeated invocation, suggested professional inexperience.

The main provision for special learning needs in the classes observed was through the use of differentiated grouping, individual instruction or the allocation of individual learning tasks. Students were also withdrawn from classrooms for additional support. The team saw the needs of different students being particularly well met in small group settings and met across grades. In only three classes, all of which were first grades, did the team observe students with special needs that were not being adequately addressed.

The time devoted to instruction at Excellence Charter School is substantial. The school day begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. Some students who participate in the school's after-school enrichment or tutoring programs stay until 5:15 p.m. The instructional year is also long: 189 days. Students interviewed by the team said that they loved the after-school program but that they sometimes got tired during the day.

USI has recruited some enthusiastic, young teachers for the school, some from Teach for America. Based on the team's observations, many of the school's teachers have the necessary zeal to make a difference to the lives of the boys at Excellence Charter School. The team learned of teachers staying late into the evening in the interest of their students and taking boys on Saturday trips as a reward for good work or behavior. However, the length and depth of professional experience remains an issue. Six lead teachers were in their first year at the school at the time of the visit. Moreover, seven of the school's eight support teachers were in their first year at the school and in their first year of teaching. An inevitable and important outcome of this situation is the partnering of teachers with limited experience in pedagogy and classroom management strategies with teachers insufficiently experienced to provide adequate role models in what is an unusual school setting. The team believes that this situation contributes to some of the classroom management and pedagogic shortcomings referred to above.

Benchmark 1D.3: The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.

The Institute's 2005-06 Evaluation Report contained a strong recommendation that Excellence Charter School hire a staff person who is New York State certified in special education. Since that report was issued, the school has hired a certified special educator who is responsible for coordination of the special education program, provides direct service to students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and acts as the liaison to parents and the school district. The special education coordinator is in charge of School Support Team (SST) meetings at which teachers and support staff meet to discuss student issues. SST meetings are held on Fridays; each week, a different grade level attends the meeting. When necessary, this group formalizes support for students with a School Support Plan. The SST revisits the Student Support Plans as part of a cycle, based on

its review of assessment data. The special education coordinator is also a member of the School Support Office, which meets once a week to discuss students and their needs. This administrative meeting is attended by the principal, social worker, reading intervention specialist, and the special education coordinator. In addition, Uncommon Schools furnishes a special education director to the school to provide increased support in this area.

Currently, 15 students at Excellence Charter School receive a variety of special education services. According to the student list reviewed by the team, two students receive special education teacher support services, 14 receive speech therapy, two receive occupational therapy, seven receive counseling, and one receives hearing services. At the time of the visit, one student was designated as an English Language Learner.

In response to another recommendation in the Institute's 2005-06 Evaluation Report, Excellence Charter School has formalized its process for identifying students who may need special education programs and/or services. The special education coordinator outlined this process in an interview with the team, which also received a copy of a document entitled "Pre-Referral Student Support Process" documenting the school's Child Find procedures. The school's leadership stated in interviews with the team that they believe that over-identification of young boys needing special education services is a problem; accordingly, the school's process considers many ways of assisting students before formally referring a student for evaluation for special education services. The current classroom configuration, which enables two teachers to be present during three English language arts blocks, enables students to be grouped in optimal fashion. All students participate during the two instructional blocks of Reading Mastery and Guided Reading. During the third block, students' needs are more closely addressed through a continuum of services. Students may work independently, work in a small group with an interventionist, or work with a teacher one-on-one. Students' needs are determined by DIBELS benchmark and progress monitoring, grade test results, Reading Mastery Check Outs, and teacher input.

The team observed small group and individual support lessons given to students at risk of academic failure. Students requiring additional support in English language arts and in mathematics have opportunities within the regular education program to receive them. In addition, the school has a process in place, as outlined in the student support process chart, for the school to determine that a student should be moved toward a special education referral and possible classification. There is a common understanding among classroom teachers concerning the interventions and services available to students at risk of academic failure.

According to the special education coordinator, all staff received training in special education services before school opened this year. The goals of that training were to enable all teachers to identify students who may be in need of special education services, to understand the basic elements of the IEP, and to be able to develop draft IEP goals that are directly linked to the student's present levels of performance.

In interviews with the team, teachers stated that they participate in inquiry groups where they address student work and student learning issues. The special education coordinator is a trained Critical Friends Coach and, as such, facilitates inquiry groups. Teachers interviewed were familiar with, and able to describe, the numerous support services available to the students in their classrooms. They felt that the specialists and support personnel worked with the classroom teachers in integrating the program so that it met the best interests of their students. The team learned that the special education

coordinator met with every teacher, including the fine arts and physical education teachers, to give them the IEPs for their students. She reviewed the plans with them, including accommodations and strategies to help the students, and each teacher was required to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of the IEPs.

In interviews with the visit team, members of the school's board of trustees stated that special education is always on the agenda. They said that the board is committed not only to fulfilling its legal responsibilities in this area but also to being the best school for special education. One board member is a parent of a student with special education needs, and the other members told the team that this parent's expertise has helped the board learn about special education. The team's observations and interviews with the school leadership, teaching staff, and board members clearly demonstrated that Excellence Charter School is aware of, and meeting, its special education obligations.

Benchmark 1E: The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning

Based on the two-day visit, the team found that Excellence Charter School has created a strong culture of order and learning. The school has adopted a code of conduct, documented in the Family Handbook that places a strict emphasis on a safe and orderly environment for all and establishes clear consequences for infractions. The school discipline policy states that without firm and consistent discipline procedures, none of what is envisioned for the school can happen. The principal told the team that he wants everyone to be aware of the discipline policy and procedures; accordingly, he holds three orientation meetings for parents prior to the start of the school year so that parents clearly understand the discipline policies. He stated that he undertakes a similar process to educate teachers about the policies. According to the principal, he directs staff to "sweat the small stuff" in the belief that if everyone is vigilant about the small misbehaviors, the larger ones will not occur. For example, the Instructional Guidelines for staff state: "We teach students the Excellence way of doing things and we insist they do it - 100% of the students 100% of the time." The team observed this policy in action in the classrooms and in the halls over the two days of the visit. For example, in one classroom, students did not exit the room properly and so were instructed by the teacher to return to the room and exit the correct way.

In most cases, the classroom management techniques observed by the team established a culture in which learning is valued. The team's observations corroborated that absolutely no low-level misbehavior is tolerated at Excellence Charter School. The team saw students being redirected again and again in all classroom visits; some of the time, however, students' behavior did not change. The team observed students in time-out; the team also observed students who had been sent out of the room and were sitting outside classrooms or were sent to the principal's office for further disciplinary action. As of April 19, 2007, 29 students had been suspended. The total number of suspensions as of that date was 67, indicating that a number of students were repeat offenders.

Teachers are encouraged to use positive feedback to manage behavior; the team saw evidence of this during classroom visits. In some classrooms, students were asked to write reflections about their choices in behavior. In other classrooms, teachers pointed out children who were doing things the right way and asked others to join them. Teachers had rewards for success including special outings to bookstores, museums, and athletic games in the neighborhood. Teachers in both teacher focus groups conducted by the team stated that they used discipline as a way to help the children grow and that their approach to discipline was based on mutual respect and learning.

All students at Excellence Charter School are required to wear uniforms. Based on the team's observations and interviews, the uniforms seemed to contribute to a sense of order and a consistency of purpose. The Family Handbook reviewed by the team explains to parents the four reasons that uniforms are an important part of the school's culture: "uniforms unite the community and make a strong visual statement of unity of purpose, students make a commitment to the standards of the school when they put on the uniform, uniforms reduce distractions and clothing competition by making everyone equal, and uniforms look professional and help students be mentally prepared for school work." During the two days of the visit, the team did not see any students out of uniform. The eight boys interviewed in the focus group said that they liked wearing uniforms and explained the different variations to the uniforms.

Parents participating in the parent focus group stated that they felt very comfortable when they dropped their sons off in the morning and that they would not feel the same way if their children were anywhere else. The school's behavioral expectations for the students are clearly on display in the hallways and in the lunchroom as well as in the classrooms. It was clear to the team that a safe and orderly environment has been established at Excellence Charter School.

Benchmark 1F: The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing academic shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.

The team found that Excellence Charter School has a professional development program that assists teachers in meeting the school's academic goals and supports them in their professional growth. The Institute's 2005-06 Evaluation Report noted that it was unclear whether the professional development opportunities offered by the school seamlessly addressed the school's mission and goals or the teachers' pedagogical needs. In response to this report, Excellence Charter School has developed a comprehensive, two-year professional development plan for 2006-2008 based on the school's mission and Accountability Plan goals as well as teacher needs. The plan sets five main goals, each based on needs assessment data, and outlines specific objectives for each goal. The two principal strategies underlying the plan are training and ongoing support.

The content of the plan dovetails with the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional practices. For example, the plan includes the following goal, needs assessment, and objective:

"Goal #1 – English Language Arts: Teachers will be equipped to ensure that Excellence Charter School students, enrolled in at least their second year, will meet or exceed New York State Elementary Learning Standards in English Language Arts.

Needs Assessment: 04-05 & 05-06 Terra Nova scores; ERSI & DIBELS performance; SUNY Site Visit Report; 05-06 USI Inspection Report; 05-06 staff evaluations; 05-06 Staff Surveys; Profile of new staff 2006-2007.

Objective #1: Teachers will be equipped to develop students' **decoding skills** to ensure that students enrolled in at least their second year will meet or exceed New York State Elementary Learning Standards in English Language Arts. **In particular, teachers need to continue to improve their ability to pace reading Mastery instruction, infuse joy in Reading Mastery instruction and assess decoding progress."**

As noted previously in this report, the team found: teachers received professional development during a summer program and throughout the year; the school's two-year professional development

plan was developed in part based on student assessment data; teachers have professional development time on Fridays, during which they review student work and use inquiry group discussions to address problems and issues related to student achievement; and UEE provides on-site professional development and support for integrating teacher-prepared assessments to the UEE-prepared lesson plans.

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

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

Benchmark 2B: The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.

The team found that the mission and vision of Excellence Charter School is clear to all stakeholders. Through interviews with focus groups of members of the board of trustees, administrators, teachers, students, and parents, as well as through individual interviews with administrators and teachers, the team found evidence that the stakeholders are aware of, and can articulate, the school's mission and key design elements. The board members paraphrased the mission as an effort to turn out a quality education for young men in the area in order to develop them as future leaders with great moral compasses. They stated that 100 percent of the school's students will go to college. The leadership spoke of the importance of the component of the mission that asserts that the boys not only attend but also graduate from college. Teachers stated that they regard their responsibility as preparing scholars with the skills they need to be successful in college work. All students interviewed by the team stated that they are attending Excellence Charter School so that they can go to college. Parents interviewed stated that they chose the school because of its mission to prepare their boys for college and its focus on academic excellence and character development. One parent said that in her view, the school's mission was to prepare her son for a successful life.

The school has implemented the key design elements included in its charter. The school culture expects excellence. According to the board, the name of the school was chosen so that everyone would understand the school's mission and the high standards to which everyone would be held, including the board, the leadership and staff, and each student and his family.

The team found that the school's mission is an integral part of the school structure. Each classroom is named after a college; thus, students in K-3rd grades become familiar with names such as Georgetown, Cornell, and Yale. Students are referred to as "scholars" in all documents as well as in daily conversation with all staff. The nine second- and third-grade students interviewed all told the team where they wanted to go to college; they also clearly articulated what it meant to them to be a scholar, including, to be smart, do good deeds, work to a higher level, and help each other. The leadership team reported that they have attempted to systematize high expectations through the use of a common language. They said that they have been making tangible for everyone the urgency of the mission.

The class sizes observed by the team averaged around 24 students per class, with two teachers in each classroom.

The team found a strong focus on literacy at the school. The instructional guidelines for the school state that "literacy is the centerpiece of our school." As stated in the school's Accountability Plan and evidenced in the daily schedule reviewed and observed by the team, the school provides over three hours of literacy instruction each day. The school maintains a library rich in multi-cultural reading materials located in the center of the second floor where academic instruction takes place. The students visit the library each week to take out books; a book report is due at the end of each week. Students told the team that they loved to read, and all of those interviewed were able to name the

titles of the books they had read. Bulletin boards in both the hallways and the classrooms were covered with stories and language about reading.

The school assigns homework to all students starting in Kindergarten. The homework is sent home each day in a folder. The “Life’s Work” folder contains one week of homework that is to be completed by the end of the school week. It also includes a daily behavior log that has to be signed by parents each night. In interviews with the team, students and parents stated that the completion of homework assignments was very important. One parent even commented that she took the folder on vacation and had her son complete his work.

Parents also told the visit team that they are closely involved with the school. They are expected to read with their sons each night, to monitor the homework folder to ensure that homework is completed, and to meet with teachers at report card time. Parents also said that the school holds educational sessions for parents once a month in the evening.

As envisioned by the charter, Excellence Charter School has an extended school day that begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m., with 6.6 hours of instruction each day. The school also has an extended school year consisting of 189 instructional days. According to the school’s Accountability Plan, the school provides at least 25 percent more instructional time over the course of the school year than the New York City Department of Education’s minimum requirement of five hours of daily instruction over 181 school days in grades K-6.

Core Knowledge is built into the weekly schedule for all grades, as discussed earlier in this report.

The school has established a teacher recruitment system designed to recruit top teachers; Uncommon Schools has assigned a three-member team to generate the best possible pool of prospective candidates for the school. The board reported that they pay teachers well and support them through professional development efforts.

Every grade level is assessed throughout the year through the administration of TerraNova, DIBELS, and ERSI assessments (discussed earlier in this report). These tests are supplemented with textbook assessments and sample New York State tests.

As envisioned by the charter, the young scholars are required to wear school uniforms; during the days of the team visit, the team saw no child out of uniform.

Values education is also a part of the weekly instructional schedule in each grade level. The Excellence Charter School creed embodies the following virtues: courage, brotherhood, hope, justice, respect, honesty, love and scholarship. These virtues are posted in every classroom. The scholars interviewed not only could explain what each virtue meant but also were able to cite examples of what each virtue looked like in action.

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

Benchmark 2D: Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.

The team found evidence that parents are satisfied with Excellence Charter School. The team interviewed a focus group of eight parents, more than half of whom had been at the school since it opened; one parent had more than one child in the school. The parents spoke about searching for the right school experience for their sons. Some were drawn to the school by its mission of excellence and college for all. Some were interested in giving their sons an all-boys experience. Several parents told the team that when they attended the school's open house, they were impressed by the school leader and the way he interacted with the boys, addressing them by name and shaking their hands. Two parents said that they had prayed for their sons to be offered places at the school and felt that their prayers had been answered.

The parents interviewed by the team spoke about the struggle to raise boys in this society and their belief that Excellence Charter School can create a new breed of men. One parent said that it takes a community to raise a child and that she believed that the school supported the home in this endeavor. Another said that she was a better parent because of the help from the school. According to the parents, the school's Family Involvement Committee holds sessions for parents each month on a variety of topics. Such topics include how to deal with a child's anger, how to help a child with mathematics and most recently, how to get a child involved in a summer program.

The parents told the team that they felt that their children were smarter and more interested in things since they had come to Excellence Charter School and that the education provided by the school was top-notch. They also expressed the view that their children's sense of values was developing. Two parents spoke of how their sons had learned to deal with conflict; another spoke about the school's emphasis on brotherhood; another said that her son was learning how to lose gracefully and to celebrate the success of others. Parents also described how the school's Kwanza celebration had brought the community together. They stated that their sons would not be afforded the same opportunities in any other school. They mentioned the school's after-school program, the tutoring program, and the school's connection to other community programs such as the Brooklyn Youth Chorus.

According to the parents, Excellence Charter School is a safe and orderly place. They said that they felt comfortable knowing their sons were at this school. They also told the team that they felt welcome in the school and that every administrator and teacher was accessible and helpful. They said that they had access to teachers' email addresses and phone numbers and knew that they could call their children's teachers any time. Parents said that even the other children knew them and addressed them when they were in the school. One parent had volunteered in her son's art class.

When asked if there was anything that concerned them about the school, parents responded that their concerns were so insignificant that they did not merit discussion. When the interview was ending, one parent summed up the feeling in the room by saying that Excellence Charter School was a piece of gold in the neighborhood.

According to the school's Annual Report, Excellence Charter School administered an anonymous parent survey during the spring of 2005-06. Parents were asked to assess their satisfaction with 15 different elements of the school's program. The scale utilized was as follows: "very satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," "somewhat dissatisfied," and "very dissatisfied." A third of the school's parent population responded to the survey. The responses were very positive: 100 percent were very satisfied with Excellence Charter School overall, and 97 percent were very satisfied with the school's "communication of high academic expectations and the school's college preparatory mission."

The team reviewed the waitlist of 304 students waiting to be enrolled at Excellence Charter School. The following are the waitlist numbers for each grade as of the date of the site visit:

- Kindergarten - 64
- Grade 1 - 90
- Grade 2 - 91
- Grade 3 - 59

According to the school's most recent Annual Report, Excellence Charter School's re-enrollment rate from the 2004-05 school year to the 2005-06 school year was 96 percent, exceeding the school's Accountability Plan measure of 90 percent per year.

The team's focus group interview with eight Excellence Charter School students from the second and third grades showed that the students have strong positive attitudes about the school. They stated that their teachers teach them more than in regular schools, that they can learn at this school, and that every lesson has fun in it. They said that their teachers were strict because they wanted them to know how to act. One student said that excellence is an act and not a habit, meaning that students are making a choice to strive for excellence every day. They all said that they were happy to be scholars and planned to go to college. The school's attendance data show that the 2005 attendance rate was 96 percent, significantly exceeding the school district's attendance rate of 90.2 percent.

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

Benchmark 2C.1: The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals.

Five members of the Excellence Charter School board of trustees were interviewed by the team, including the managing director, employed by Uncommon Schools. The school's board chair was present by phone. The Institute's 2005-06 Evaluation Report noted that the school board was in the process of developing a management agreement with Uncommon Schools. Since that time, the agreement has been executed. According to the agreement, which the team reviewed, Uncommon Schools is responsible for development of the educational program at Excellence Charter School as well as a number of other areas, including financial management, recruitment, general legal counsel and human resources assistance, facilities management, and grants management. Uncommon Schools is also responsible for providing special education and technology directors who offer assistance to the school coordinators in these areas. The board stated that they currently do not have an evaluation tool in place to evaluate the performance of Uncommon Schools, yet one is in the process of being developed.

The school board's meeting schedule for the 2006-07 school year showed that the board would meet in October, January, March, May and June. The team's review of the minutes for the meetings showed that at each meeting, the board received a very extensive academic report, called the "Performance Dashboard," that is prepared by the Excellence leadership team using a template developed for all Uncommon Schools. The report focused on enrollment, attendance, and attrition

rates, and reasons for attrition; the report also provided data on student test scores and benchmark attainment.

The team's interview with the board clearly showed that the members understand the core business of Excellence Charter School, believe in the school's mission, and are determined to ensure that 100 percent of the school's students go to college. They spoke passionately about closing the achievement gap. One member stated that, 53 years after *Brown v. the Board of Education*, there is still a long way to go in closing that gap. Board members told the team that they want the students at Excellence Charter School to receive the same high-quality education that they would receive at the best private school in Manhattan and that they are determined to deliver the best Kindergarten through eighth grade education in the district. They said that they have hired a great group of educators and are holding them to high standards. They also stated that, although members of the board have considerable experience in education, there is no need for them to micromanage the school's educational program as long as the students are hitting the benchmarks designated in the school's Accountability Plan. According to the board members interviewed by the team, they constantly monitor assessment data.

The board has evaluated the principal in the past but has now delegated this task to Uncommon Schools. Although that evaluation had not yet been completed at the time of the team's visit, the team reviewed the evaluation tool that will be used by Uncommon Schools in this year's evaluation.

The board does not have a formal strategic plan in place. According to the chair, the board has two goals: to grow the school and to keep driving the academic program to in order to deliver an excellent education for the students.

The board does have a process in place for its further growth and development. Its recruitment subcommittee has been delegated responsibility in this area. The board members interviewed stated that they want the board to be as strong as possible and that they intend to recruit members with a passion for a school dedicated to bridging the achievement gap. Prospective board members are asked to write a letter of interest, to visit the school, to meet with the leadership, and then to interview with the recruitment subcommittee. The latter recommends new members to the board. Newly elected members are provided with an orientation to the school.

V. OVERALL TRENDS REGARDING THE SCHOOL

Academic Program

Excellence Charter School has created an academic culture where students are called scholars and academic rigor is valued and expected. The school's balanced-literacy program teaches students to love reading. The school's writing program allows students to think like writers and to share their work with each other. Students also talk about what they like to write. The school's successful DIBELS results attest to the breadth of the English language arts program. Mathematics achievement is also strong, as was the mathematics fact work observed. Each student's Life's Work folder, which holds student homework and daily behavior accomplishments, serves not only as a communication system for parents but also as a reminder to students that learning truly is life work.

Music and art are also important components of the school's curriculum; students say they love to sing and dance. The after-school program offers a variety of enrichment opportunities and the after-school program offers support to all who need it.

Inquiry groups for teachers to review student work and discuss student progress are an important part of the professional development work on Fridays. However, as noted in the previous site visit report, novice teachers continue to need additional professional development.

The work ahead for Excellence Charter School is to prepare to add 4th through 8th grades and to manage the impact that this expansion will have on existing programs and instructional strategies. In particular, the school will need to pay attention to the need to develop the skills of independent and group learning as the scholars progress. In addition, the classroom management skills of less experienced members of the school's staff will need to be a focus of continuing development.

Organizational Viability

The school's board of trustees has a strong relationship with Uncommon Schools. The review team determined through board and management team interviews and in dialogue with school staff that a management team committed to academic excellence is in place. The leadership at Excellence Charter School is strong and committed to the mission. The leadership team is also adequately staffed, with clear role definition yet a real sense of a team approach in meeting the particular and exacting challenges of the school population.

Parents are very supportive of the school and the communication between parents and the school is very effective. Evidence of this was gathered by talking with parents and by reviewing the various instruments of communication between school and home.

The school has a large waiting list.

The school facility is a state of the art building with some uniquely pleasing aspects that enhance the learning environment. These include an Astroturf games area on the roof, overlooking the city and a particularly well stocked and furnished library. The facility will accommodate the full capacity of a Kindergarten through eighth grade school.

The school has responded thoughtfully and seriously to the concerns raised in the Institute's 2005-06 Evaluation Report. These either have been, or are in the process of being, addressed.

It is not uncommon for start-up schools to be guided in their planning by the opening mission and to direct their energies to ensuring high achievement for the initial cohorts of students. However, the lack of a strategic plan at Excellence Charter School is likely to make the school vulnerable to ad-hoc decision making as it grows and adds grades of older students. As stated above it will be particularly important to plan strategies to develop the scholars as independent learners and shift the locus of control for good behavior and high achievement to them. This will require strategic planning of scheduling, instruction, and programs. Successful growth will also depend on the school's ability to limit staff turnover and add more experience to its teaching staff.

APPENDIX A:

Framework for Report Discussion

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

APPENDIX B

Charter Renewal Benchmarks

Version 3.2

June 2006

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An Introduction to the Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmarks serve primarily two functions at renewal:

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

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

- The Charter Schools Institute does not have a point system for determining whether a school will be renewed. In other words, a school cannot simply tally up the number of benchmarks it meets to determine whether it will be renewed.
- A large part of why such a tally is impossible is that some benchmarks count more than others. In particular, the State University gives the greatest weight to how well the school met its academic Accountability Plan measures. As such, despite the fact that this comprises only a single benchmark, a school's performance on that benchmark is critical. Indeed, it is so important that while fiscal and organizational failures can cause a school to not be renewed (if sufficiently serious), excellence in these areas will not excuse poor academic performance.
- The Institute does not use every benchmark during every kind of renewal review, and how they are used differs depending on a school's circumstances. For instance, the qualitative academic performance benchmarks (Benchmarks 1B-1F) are given far less weight when a school that has been renewed one or more times previously, applies for renewal again. Similarly, less weight is accorded these benchmarks during an initial renewal review where a school has shown that it has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
- Again as set forth in the *Renewal Practices*, in greater detail, aside from the benchmark regarding meeting the academic Accountability Plan goals (which is singular in its importance), no school should fear that a failure to meet every benchmark means that the

school is not in a position to make a case for renewal. To the contrary, the Institute has yet to see a school—or any institution for that matter—that is perfect in every respect. The Institute appreciates that the benchmarks set a very high standard collectively. While the Institute certainly hopes and expects that schools aim high, it is understood that a school’s reach will necessarily exceed its grasp in at least some aspects.

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p align="center">Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 1A</p> <p align="center">Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p align="center">1A.1</p> <p>English Language Arts: The school meets or has come close to meeting the English Language Arts goal in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.2</p> <p>Mathematics: The school meets or has come close to meeting the mathematics goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.3</p> <p>Science: The school meets or has come close to meeting the science goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.4</p> <p>Social Studies: The school meets or has come close to meeting the social studies goal contained in its Accountability Plan over the term of its charter.</p>
	<p align="center">1A.5</p> <p>NCLB: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 1B</p> <p align="center">Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p align="center">1B</p> <p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and to use it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the regular administration of assessments, and the regular assignment of student work, e.g., projects, papers, etc., that are aligned to the state performance standards and to the school's curricular scope and sequence; • the systematic collection of data from such assessments and student work; • the use of protocols and procedures that ensure that the scoring of standardized and other assessments as well as student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school's use of assessment data to determine accurately whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school leadership's use of assessment data to monitor and make improvements and changes to the school's curriculum and instruction, e.g., changes to remediation, professional development, personnel, etc.; teachers' use of assessment data to make changes and improvements to curriculum and instruction, e.g., re-teaching a key skill where data indicates that the skill was not learned the first time; a common understanding between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; and the regular communication of assessment outcomes to the entire school community, including communication to parents not only of their children's individual performances but of the performance of the school as a whole.
<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p> <p>The school has a clearly defined and aligned curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has defined with precision in each grade and core academic subject the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve—at a minimum such skills and knowledge are aligned with and as rigorous as the relevant state performance standards; teachers are fully aware of the curricula for which they are responsible for teaching and have timely access to guidelines (scope and sequence, pacing charts, etc.) available for developing lesson plans; teachers develop lesson plans that are in alignment with the guidelines and follow those plans; and the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and seamless from grade to grade.
<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>1D.1</p> <p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the priorities set by the school's leadership are responsive to and consistent with achieving the school's academic Accountability Plan goals and addressing deficiencies; these priorities are communicated to, and understood by, the school's instructional staff; the school's leadership has taken concerted and consistent action in line with these priorities;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school's leadership has in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teachers' effectiveness and quality; the school's leadership, based on classroom visits, and other data available to it, provides direct ongoing coaching and support in classrooms as well as structured opportunities for teachers to plan for the delivery of the instructional program; the school's leadership makes staffing decisions that are driven by its evaluation system and has in place a system for recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and other instructional personnel that the school needs to meet its academic goals and measures; the chief executive has deployed a leadership team whose members, in executing their roles and responsibilities, are able to support the effective delivery of the instructional program; and the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations.
	<p>1D.2 High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers demonstrate subject-matter competency in the subjects they teach; lessons are focused on specific learning objectives aligned to state performance standards and reflect a clear understanding of students' current skill and knowledge; students are fully engaged in focused, purposeful activities; instruction is delivered efficiently with clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; instructional time is maximized, transitions are efficient, there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and teachers ask challenging questions to provoke student problem solving skills and assess student learning.
	<p>1D.3 The school has programs that are demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically to meet the school's academic Accountability Plan goals, including programs for students who require additional academic supports, programs for English Language Learners and programs for students eligible to receive special education.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p>

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployment of resources sufficient to support interventions and implement programs, which reflect a range of services and needs (in-class and remedial support, special education and ELL programs), depending on students' academic and/or behavioral needs; • screening procedures for identifying students and providing them with the appropriate intervention, including appropriate Child Find procedures; • a common understanding among classroom teachers of the interventions and services available to students at risk of academic failure, as well as procedures for accessing them; • coordination of interventions and services with those of the mainstream program; and • monitoring the performance of students and using established school-wide and legal exit criteria for students, who based on their performance or other required assessments and evaluations, no longer need special interventions or services.
<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school's culture allows and promotes a culture of learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; • classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued; • low-level misbehavior is not tolerated, e.g., students are not allowed to opt-out of learning or engage in quiet chatter during class time; • throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals, by addressing identified shortcomings in student learning and teacher pedagogical skill and content knowledge.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient resources to support a comprehensive program; • the content of the program dovetails with the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional strategy;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual plans are derived from a school needs-assessment, based on identified instructional weaknesses, teacher interests, and analyses of student outcomes; • the school earmarks effective, ongoing support and training to novice teachers and teachers new to the school; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p style="text-align: center;">Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 2A</p> <p>School Specific Non-Academic Goals</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2A</p> <p>The school meets or has come close to meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter (if any).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2B</p> <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, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders are aware of, and can articulate, the mission and key design elements; and • the school has carried out the components of its mission statement and implemented its key design elements.
<p style="text-align: center;">Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2C.1</p> <p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school's mission and specific goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board will have received regular reports in writing from the school leadership in regards to key indicators of the school's academic progress; the content of those reports, and a calendar for them, will have been agreed to by the board and the leadership team; • the board (or a committee thereof) will understand the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the board will have conducted formal evaluations of the school's management and will have acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrate shortcomings in management's performance; where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school's academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board will have taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; the board will not have made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; the board will have established a set of priorities and a strategic plan that are in line with the school's goals and mission and will have effectively worked to implement those goals and plans; and the board will have in place a process for selecting new members as needed and structural continuity.
	<p>2C.2 The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics)—which are consistent with those set forth in the charter—and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school's charter; the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts-of-interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts-of-interest in a clear and transparent manner; the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy, including acting in a timely fashion on such complaints; the school has abided by its by-laws, including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; and the school board has in place a set of board policies which are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the great majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; a large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school; parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and students have strong positive attitudes (including an attendance rate exceeding that of comparable public schools).
<p>Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>2E</p> <p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> during the term of its charter, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements; at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations; the school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met; the school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house, and where appropriate, independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p align="center">Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?</p>
<p align="center">Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p align="center">3A</p> <p>The school has operated pursuant to a long-range financial plan. The school has created realistic budgets that are monitored and adjusted when appropriate. Actual expenses have been equal to or less than actual revenue with no material exceptions.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • the budget process starts early and input from board members, school administration and staff is solicited and considered in developing the budget; • the school's long-range fiscal plan is compared frequently to actual progress and adjusted to meet changing conditions; and • budget variances are analyzed routinely and material variance are discussed and addressed at the board level including any necessary budget revisions.
<p align="center">Benchmark 3B Internal Controls</p>	<p align="center">3B</p> <p>The school has maintained appropriate internal controls and procedures. Transactions have been accurately recorded and appropriately documented in accordance with management's direction and laws, regulations, grants and contracts. Assets have been and are safeguarded. Any deficiencies or audit findings have been corrected in a timely manner.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies and analyzes risks and takes actions to mitigate such risks; • the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out; • the school monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy;

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school's board members and employees adhere to a code of ethics; the school makes purchasing decisions that consider price, quality and dependability and makes each purchasing selection with the intention of maintaining a top-quality school; the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements; a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; the school ensures that employees, board members and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, State Education Department, or the Institute, if needed.
<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3C</p> <p>The school has complied with financial reporting requirements. The school has provided the State University Board of Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports on time, and such reports have been complete and have followed generally accepted accounting principles.</p> <p>The following reports will have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> annual financial statement audit reports, including federal Single Audit report if applicable. annual budgets and cash flow statements. un-audited quarterly reports of income and expense. bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and State Education Department; and grant expenditure reports.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3D</p> <p>The school has maintained adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations and has monitored and successfully managed cash flow. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).</p> <p>Elements that are generally present, and which the Institute will look for, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly; • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • the school provides education services at a level that meets the needs of all students demonstrated by student results that meet or exceed state standards; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<p>Renewal Question 4</p> <p>Should the School's Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?</p>
<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Plans for the School Structure (mission, enrollment, schedule)</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>Key structural elements of the school's plans for the next charter period are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's mission statement reflects the school's overall plans for the next charter period and there is evidence that the school will be able to fulfill that mission. • The yearly and daily schedules are clearly laid out and reflect that they are consistent with, and will allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals; such plans are also reflected in the school's proposed budget, and the time on instruction meets all legal requirements. • Where the school is providing secondary instruction, the requirements for graduation are clearly set out and consistent with the standards set by the Board of Regents.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school's enrollment structure is reasonable, feasible and achievable and consistent with the school's proposed staffing plan and budget. Where the school's enrollment structure provides for significant growth in existing grades, the school has provided sufficient evidence that it will be able to meet those proposed enrollment numbers.
<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Plans for the Educational Program</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has clearly laid out its plans for its educational program, shown that it can implement that program and such program will allow the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A school that proposes a material redesign to the educational program for the term of the proposed renewal charter will have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the school meeting its Accountability Plan goals and presented a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new design. <p>The school's plan should include a detailed review of the plans in regards to assessment, remediation, curriculum, professional development, etc. The school will also have provided a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new design will be adequately resourced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A school that seeks to provide instruction in new grades will have presented an outline of the academic program for those grades and provided research and evidence that the design will result in the schools meeting their Accountability Plan goals in those new grades. The school's plan should include a detailed review of the plans in regards to assessment, remediation, curriculum, professional development, etc. The school will also have provided a detailed staffing plan and organizational chart that demonstrates that the new grades will be adequately and appropriately resourced. The school's Key Design Elements lay out the essential elements of the school's academic program in a comprehensive yet succinct form. The school has submitted a proposed Accountability Plan that is consistent with the Institute's standards for such plans.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For a school that is not seeking to add additional grades, the school will have provided plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period. For a school that is seeking to add grades, the school will have provided plans for sustaining (and where possible) improving upon the student outcomes the school has compiled during the last charter period for those grades that it served during the last charter period.
<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>Plans for the Governance Structure</p>	<p>4C The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable governance structure for the term of the next charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present and that the Institute will look for during its review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school will have provided a set of legally sufficient by-laws. The school will have provided a code of ethics that details the conduct expected of the school's stakeholders and sets forth standards and procedures for avoiding and/or handling conflicts-of-interest. The school will have provided a board organizational chart that is consistent with the school's by-laws. If the school is to be no longer associated with the partnering organization with which it filed its original application it will have explained the reasons for the disassociation and outlined how those functions previously associated with that partnering organization will be handled. If the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure—whether a Charter Management Organization (CMO) or Education Service Provider (ESP)—or vice-versa, or is changing its CMO or ESP, the school will have provided the information requested in the renewal application guidance (Question 4c) and such information will allow the Institute to conclude that the school will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school. If the school is making other significant changes to its management structure (including adding grades) it will explain why that structure will be effective, sound and viable, including how it will appropriately oversee the academic and fiscal performance of the school. A school should have provided plans that show how it will sustain the performance of its governance model in the next charter period.

Evidence Category	Benchmarks
<p>Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4 D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable, feasible and achievable appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of next charter, including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted by the school's fiscal plan for the term of its next charter. In addition, fiscal plans provided for a future charter term reflect sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs.</p> <p>The plan should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe all major assumptions used in its development; • disclose anticipated staffing levels; • be accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions; and • include information on enrollment demand to support the reasonableness of projected enrollment.