

Charter Schools Institute

State University of New York

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School
Second Year Report
(2004-2005)

March 14, 2006

READER'S GUIDE

Background

Authorized by the New York Charter Schools Act of 1998, charter schools are public schools that operate independently of local school districts and are created by civic leaders, community groups, educators and parents interested in bringing public school choice to their communities and improving student achievement, particularly for children at-risk of academic failure.

The New York Charter Schools Act empowers the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (the State University Trustees), the New York State Board of Regents (the Regents), or local boards of education to authorize new public charter schools (in New York City, authorizing power is vested in the Chancellor) and thereafter to renew charters of successful schools. Additionally, existing traditional district-operated schools can seek to convert to charter status through their governing boards of education.

The Charter Schools Institute (the Institute) was established by the State University Trustees to assist in the review and approval of applications to establish charter schools, oversight of chartered schools, and renewal of charters.

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

In exchange for freedom from many State rules and regulations, a public charter school receives a charter, or contract, of up to five years and must meet stated student performance goals that are set forth in its "Accountability Plan" or risk losing its charter or not having its charter renewed, in which case it would close. This tradeoff – freedom from rules and regulations in exchange for unprecedented accountability for student performance, and real consequences for failure – is one of the most significant differences between public charter schools and other public schools that school districts administer.

The Oversight Process

As noted above, the State University Trustees, jointly with the Board of Regents, are required to provide oversight sufficient to ensure that each charter school that the Trustees have authorized is in compliance with applicable law and the terms of its charter. The Institute, together with the State Education Department, monitors compliance through a monitoring plan and other methods.

In addition to monitoring compliance with the law, the State University Trustees view their oversight responsibility more broadly and positively. Accordingly, they have adopted policies

that require the Institute to provide ongoing evaluation of charter schools authorized by them, including the strength of their educational programs and organizational structures.

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

A central component of the Institute's evaluative oversight system is a schedule of periodic visits to and inspections of charter schools, resulting in letters and reports to the school's board of trustees. As the result of the periodic visits and inspections, by the end of the charter period, both the Institute and school will have a mutual sense of the school's strengths and weaknesses as viewed over time, especially as viewed through the prism of charter renewal.

In evaluating schools, the Institute uses a series of benchmarks that cover not only the strength of the academic program but the strength and effectiveness of the organizational and fiscal policies, structures and procedures that the school has instituted at the time of the visit. How these benchmarks are used (and which are used) varies, depending on the specific year of the visit.¹

In particular, the Institute utilizes a series of qualitative indicators to review the effectiveness of a charter school's academic programs, e.g., the strength of a school's internal assessment system, the rigor of its pedagogical approach, and the breadth and focus of the school's curriculum. In the formative years of a school (generally the first three years of operation), these benchmark indicators are important precisely because the quantitative indicators of academic achievement, i.e., students' performance on standardized tests (especially the Regents assessments), are generally few in number and difficult to interpret (for instance, it would be difficult to tease out in the first year the value-added that the school has contributed to a student's success on the fourth grade State assessments). The qualitative indicators serve as proxy indicators, therefore, for student assessment data sets that are necessarily incomplete and incipient. Moreover, only by

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

using these qualitative indicators can the Institute provide feedback not only on “how” the school is doing but also “why” it is succeeding or failing.²

Over time of course, and particularly at the school’s initial renewal (and subsequent renewals thereafter), the quantitative indicators, student test scores, take on paramount importance and the qualitative indicators concordantly diminish in importance. This is consonant with the fact that charter schools are responsible for results (outcome measures).³

The Second Year Report

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

The report reflects the observations and findings from the one-day inspection visit conducted typically by a two to four member team comprised of Institute staff, and, in some cases, outside experts. Consistent with the Institute’s evaluation process throughout the life of the charter, Institute visitors on a second year visit seek evidence of effectiveness in key areas: the academic success of the school including teaching and learning (curriculum, instruction and assessment); the effectiveness and viability of the school as an organization, including such items as board operations and student order and discipline; and the fiscal soundness of the school. Although issues regarding compliance with state and federal laws and regulations may be noted (and subsequently addressed), compliance is not the ultimate purpose of the visit.

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

In reviewing this report, readers should keep in mind that charter schools face major challenges in the first few years of their charter, and not all charter schools address each challenge at the same pace. These challenges include:

- establishing a positive, academically focused school culture that provides high expectations, support and encouragement for students and teaching staff, and any necessary remediation for students;

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

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

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

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

For the reasons above, and because of the inherent complexity of an organization such as a school, the Second Year Report does not contain a rating or a single comprehensive indicator that would indicate at a glance that the school is “on track” to be renewed or is not. It does, however, in the “Summary” section, summarize the various strengths of the school and the areas that the inspection team found in need of improvement.

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

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

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

While this level of what can reasonably be termed “brutal honesty” is necessary, as is the focus on areas for improvement, readers should remember that almost no other entity in education is

held to such a high standard of review. This is especially true of public schools that traditional districts and Boards of Education oversee. In so saying, the Institute does not ask the reader to make excuses for schools that are not succeeding – and the Institute’s accountability system does not and will not – but we do note that providing this level of accountability, which almost every charter school welcomes and even advocates for, represents in and of itself a revolution in how public education is governed.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Mission

“The mission of the Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (BECS) is to provide students a challenging academic program, which develops all students’ ability to master fundamental academic skills and ultimately achieve at levels exceeding citywide averages, while also instilling a sense of family, community and leadership within all of our students.”

The BECS Accountability Plan further stipulates that the mission is:

“Working in partnership with parents and community, Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School (Brooklyn Excelsior) will offer a challenging character-based education by providing a strong curriculum and an atmosphere of high expectations.”

Background

The Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School is located at 856 Quincy Street in Brooklyn, New York 11221. The school’s five-year charter was approved on March 19, 2002.

Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School laid out an ambitious educational program in its charter. However operational matters such as occupying a “new” facility have been a distraction for the school, which has encountered difficulties providing across all grades the level of instruction necessary to achieve its goals.

The Executive Summary of the charter notes the applicants turned to National Heritage Academies (NHA) for a strong educational foundation: “NHA has built a reputation for offering a rigorous liberal arts curriculum for K-8 public charter schools that focuses on mastery of all subjects, particularly in the core areas of reading, language arts, mathematics and science.” The charter calls for the use of Open Court’s *Collections for Young Scholars* for reading, Saxon Math, and the Hirsch Core Knowledge Sequence for History, Geography, and Government.

In the charter, BECS planned to create six parent-teacher committees to encourage parent-staff involvement (Leadership Development, Library, Grounds and Facility, Technology, Curriculum, and Boosters). However, the minutes of the school’s board of directors provide little evidence of the activity of these committees. The work of these committees is included under the “School Leadership Team Report” routinely delivered by the principal.

BECS also intended to encourage strong ties and communication between families and teachers through the use of *Academy Link*, NHA’s web-based program that allows parents to constantly monitor their children’s progress and communicate with school teachers and leaders. It is not clear the extent to which the school actually employs *Academy Link*.

The charter includes a number of instructional practices to be used at the school:

- project-based learning;
- computer-assisted instruction;

- group and individual learning;
- thematic instruction;
- tutoring of individual students;
- community-based learning (field trips, service-oriented projects); and
- teacher-directed instruction.

The charter anticipated 182 instructional days in the school year, with a seven-hour, 15 minute day (8:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.). The school's 2004-05 school year includes 181 days, with a seven-hour school day (8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.).

Since the school's inception, the board of trustees has remained intact with five of the founding seven board members continuing to serve. The board, along with NHA, has encountered several problems that undermined the school's capacity to provide a stable learning environment.

The school leased the second floor of a former school building for the first year of instruction. The second school year was delayed nearly three weeks because major renovations of a 55,000 square foot former New York City (NYC) public school were not completed in time.

Much of the school's interaction with the Institute has involved its efforts to revise the enrollment and grade structure. In September 2002, the board revised the grade structure from Kindergarten through fifth to Kindergarten through fourth without informing the Institute, as stipulated in the charter.

Though enrollment for the 2003-04 school year was projected at 240, there were only 187 students in attendance, putting the school below the "floor" of 15 percent permitted in the charter. The Institute approved the new enrollment, but rejected subsequent requests for increased enrollment. Instead, the SUNY Board of Trustees approved adding a ceiling above the enrollment projected in the charter of 10 percent or 25 students, whichever is less.

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR FINDINGS

During the End-of-Year School Visit (2003-04), Institute staff found the school had put in place the essential components contained in the charter application, but noted BECS needs to ensure that instructional delivery and teacher assessment of student performance occur at every grade-level. While there was evidence of direct teaching in the lower grades, “Less than appreciable instructional effectiveness was observed in the upper grades, where teachers primarily lectured and nominally assessed student comprehension during lessons.”

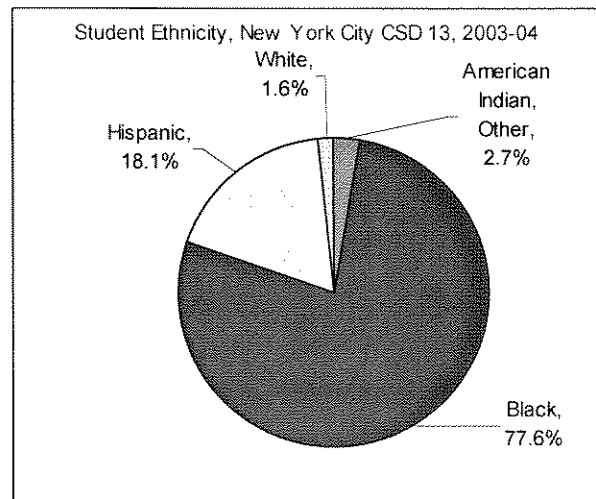
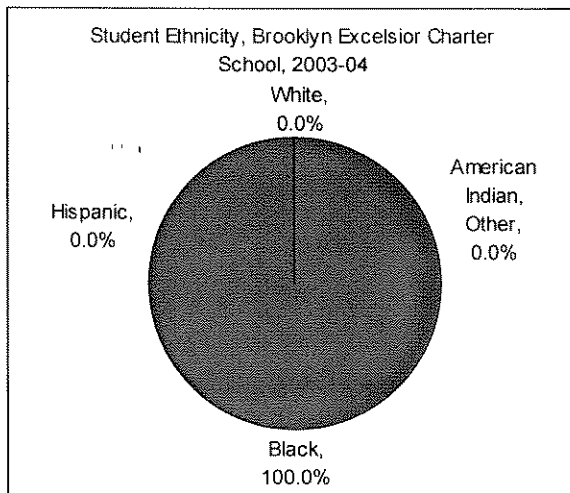
Institute staff noted in particular that BECS administrators were not clear on how to use NHA assessments to help teachers strengthen or modify their instructional practices. Staff members were unable to explain how the NHA computer-based testing system was connected to New York State (NYS) Learning Standards.

Despite these shortcomings, the school remains a very popular option for parents. Along with the 538 students planned return for the 2005-06 school year, another 1,144 timely applications were received.

Enrollment

YEAR	ORIGINAL CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	APPROVED CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ORIGINAL CHARTERED GRADES SERVED	APPROVED GRADES SERVED	ACTUAL GRADES SERVED
2002-2003	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year	Planning Year
2003-2004	240	240	187	K-5	K-4	K-4
2004-2005	480	480	487	K-6	K-5	K-5
2005-2006	580			K-7	K-6	K-6
2006-2007	630			K-8	K-7	K-7

Demographics



Free Lunch (2003-04)

Brooklyn Excelsior CS	40.8%
CSD 13	84.0 %

Students with Disabilities (2003-04)

Brooklyn Excelsior CS	4.4%
CSD 13	13.4%

SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR FINDINGS

The results of the Second Year Visit concluded that the Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School has one achievement to date: it has been able to establish a stable learning environment for students. Discipline is mostly smooth. Students are generally well-behaved, transitions are simple and well organized, students are on-task for the most part, and classroom rituals are mostly in place.

Areas for Improvement

1. According to Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School's 2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report, the school met none of its outcome measures in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.
2. Student writing is limited in the school, and the curriculum is too focused on worksheets.
3. Saxon Math has not been fully implemented. If a combination of various programs is to be utilized, the school should be explicit about what it is teaching and when.
4. BECS has many new teachers to train and the result is that teaching is uneven, often slow, and dictated by worksheet requirements. In particular, teachers need to increase the rigor of their instruction and their expectations for students.
5. "Project-based learning" and the Core Knowledge programs show little to no evidence of being implemented.
6. The BECS instructional school day (8:30 – 2:45 pm) is too short and is not what the charter promises (8 am – 3 pm). The BECS board and administration should work through whatever transportation issues exist in order to achieve a longer instructional day.
7. Lastly, there is no common discipline system utilized in the school – each teacher is determining discipline rules in an ad hoc manner.

BENCHMARKS

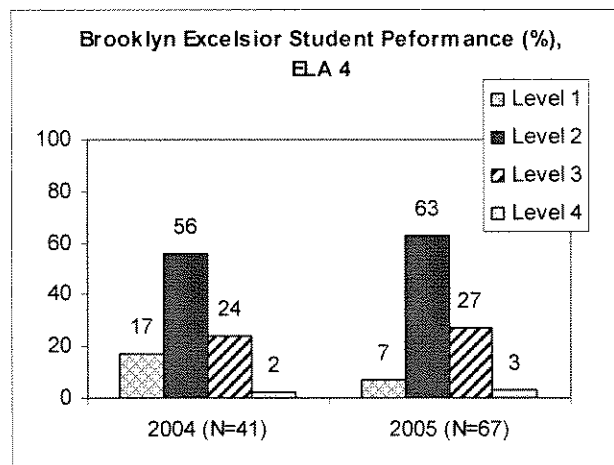
What follows are the selected benchmarks used by the Institute in preparing this report. These benchmarks focus on the critical issues of teaching, learning and assessment as well as organizational and fiscal responsibility. Evidence from visits conducted during the year is summarized under each benchmark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

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

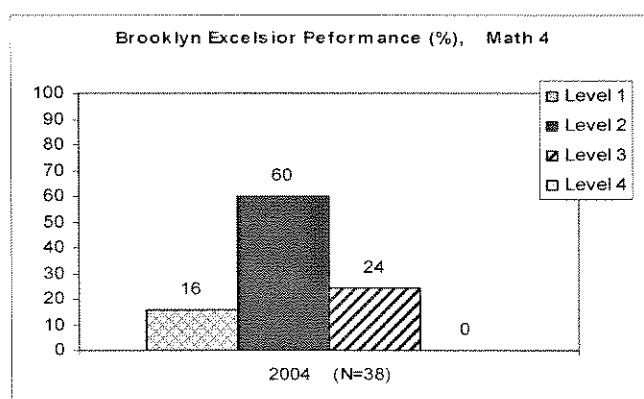
According to Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School's 2005 Accountability Plan Progress Report, the school met none of its outcome measures in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Results of the State's fourth grade examinations and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) tests administered in the second through fifth grades indicate that the school made virtually no progress toward its goals in 2004-05, its second year of operation, and remains far below standards.

Absolute Measures

State Fourth Grade ELA Results



State Fourth Grade Math Results



BECS's fourth grade students scored very low on the 2004 State examinations in ELA and math. While the results in ELA are based on a test administration only after students had attended the school for five months, the results in ELA for 2005 were almost the same. Further, in 2005 fourth graders who were in the school for their second year performed below students who were enrolled for the first time in 2004-05. With only 23 percent of the second-year fourth graders scoring at Levels 3 and 4, the school was far below the 60 percent goal of its accountability plan outcome measure. Math results are currently only available for 2004; when only 24 percent of all fourth graders tested scored at Levels 3 and 4.

Comparative Measures

Subject on State's Fourth Grade Exams	Comparison	Results by School Year	
		2003-04	2004-05
ELA	BECS	27	28
	Region 8	49	58
Math	BECS	24	N/A
	Region 8	66	N/A

Source: NYC Department of Education

In 2004, BECS underperformed the New York City school region by a great extent on both the ELA and math fourth grade State exams. In 2005, while the region showed notable gains on the ELA exam, BECS' results were virtually unchanged.

In its accountability plan, BECS includes as a comparison five city public schools in the same region. It scored at least 20 percent below four of the five schools on the ELA exam in both 2004 and 2005; and it scored at least 30 percent below all five schools on the math exam in 2004.

Value Added Measures

On the NWEA Reading Battery administered in 2004 and 2005, one of three grade cohorts met the goal of meaningfully reducing the gap between their 2004 performance and scoring at grade level in 2005; the other two cohorts not only did not meet the goal, but actually *increased* the gap between their performance and grade level. On the NWEA Math Battery administered in 2004 and 2005, the same grade cohort showed progress toward grade level, while the other two again declined.

All in all, these results indicate that BECS is not adding sufficient value to student learning, such that students are likely to leave the school scoring at grade level, a bare minimum for succeeding in rigorous middle and high school programs.

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

Use of Assessments and State Learning Standards

As BECS utilizes the Open Court and Saxon Math programs, both those programs' assessments are used. The school also uses the Kindergarten through first grade Star Literacy Test for younger students, as well as the NWEA benchmarks three times a year. It is not clear if NWEA is predictive of success on state tests. In fact, students seem to be doing better on NWEA, than on state tests – creating a reliability problem for the school with its assessment system. [BECS needs an assessment system which will be predictive of likely success on the NYS tests since those goals are quite clear within the school's accountability plan.]

The school is reputedly using Operation Breakthrough although it was barely in evidence. Operation Breakthrough's plan is to focus students on math and reading achievement via ability-based groups. Operation Breakthrough, for the Novice student, channels student's time exclusively on math and reading. When a student reaches grade level, they are re-introduced to specials such as science and social studies. BECS administration had many plans for how to best share student data regularly with the staff, at the time of the visit. However, an internal assessment system for monitoring student performance within their ability groups has not been implemented.

While, it appears that many structures (e.g., full staff meetings and grade level meetings) have been established for student achievement data to be shared by staff, it is not clear that they are being used to the best advantage. The Dean of Instruction told the Institute about several methods of sharing data that should be helpful for the staff to quickly move students to the appropriate ability-groups.

Student Work

Notebooks in classrooms were often sloppy and of low-quality in terms of demonstrating student ability or mastery of NYS standards. Teachers often did not correct work. Final copies of student work were not posted in several classrooms, while in classes where it was, final copies were filled with mistakes and/or had no teacher feedback or grade.

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

Clearly Defined Curriculum

BECS has some elements of a common curriculum, but has not yet achieved a clearly defined curriculum. For example, the BECS staff is implementing the Open Court program, yet it is not clear how teachers are “picking and choosing” what components of the program to do. The school should determine how these decisions are made as a group. Principal Handel also noted that a high priority is for the staff to obtain more training in the Open Court reading component.

BECS staff is not fully committed to implementing Saxon Math and has considered replacing Saxon Math with Chicago's Everyday Math. Additionally, the staff is neither using Core Knowledge, nor the Project-based learning as promised in their charter. It was not at all clear why these curricular program elements were not being utilized.

While teachers were using some NHA on-line lessons, they are used haphazardly, at an individual or grade level's discretion, rather than as a school-wide practice.

Instructional Strategies

BECS has grown rapidly and has many new teachers and a new Dean of Instruction. In particular, BECS grew from 10 to 21 rooms in one year and 13 teachers were new to the school this year. The result has been very un-even teaching from room to room and the pacing of lessons is often slow and not rigorous enough to maintain student interest. While some teachers are extending the lesson by asking students solid and thought-provoking questions, many teachers were not prepared for more sophisticated questions that students asked of them regarding the lesson.

At-Risk Learners

Although NHA's Operation Breakthrough is reportedly constructed for the novice or at-risk student, there was scant evidence that this program was in operation at Brooklyn Excelsior.⁴ Apparently, NHA intends to imbue this school with Operation Breakthrough at some point in the future.

BECS reported having an after-school program for first graders called "Read for Excellence." It is staffed with volunteers from the local high school. This program was not observed by Institute staff on their one-day visit.

⁴According to the NHA information video, Operation Breakthrough helps teachers' customize their classes by placing students in homogeneous grouping such as proficient, basic and novice. If a student is deemed to enter a "novice lane" he or she will forego all specials, science and social studies in order to allow more time for math and reading. Operation Breakthrough, while designed to be a temporary placement and fluid within the three groups or "lanes", it is unclear how the teachers arrive at a placement decision and what instruments are used to transport students in and out of the program as well as within the three groups.

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

BECS has been able to establish a stable learning environment for students. Discipline is generally smooth. Students are generally well-behaved and transitions are simple and well organized. Classroom routines appear to be in place.

At the time of the visit, Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School did not have a school-wide discipline policy in place. A school-wide discipline policy in which administration, teachers, students and parents articulate an identical message may facilitate greater success of that policy by creating an atmosphere more conducive for academic achievement.

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Governance (Board of Trustees & School Leadership)</p>	<p>2C.1</p> <p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes and has abided by them.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and a code of ethics) and has consistently abided by them through the term of the school's charter. Where possible, the board has avoided creating conflicts-of-interest. The school board has also maintained and abided by the corporation's by-laws. In addition, a board meeting this benchmark will have actively sought information from the staff, parents, and community and student populations. The system for hearing such views and concerns will have been consistently implemented so that all views and concerns were appropriately heard and acted upon. The board will have published, reviewed and communicated policies annually and currently maintains an up-to-date policy manual.</p> <p>2C.2</p> <p>The board and school leadership clearly articulate the school's mission and design and work to implement it effectively.</p> <p>To fully meet this benchmark, school leaders and board members should be able to evidence a strong understanding of the school design and demonstrate that they have referred to it regularly in managing and governing the school. Moreover, the board and the school's administration should have deployed resources effectively to further the academic and organizational success of the school. At the board level, the board should have a process for selecting both board members and the school leader or school leadership team that is timely and effective and such process should result in a stable and effective board and leadership team. The board should also have evaluated school leadership on an annual basis. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined goals and measurements. The school board and school leadership should be able to demonstrate that they are facile with the process.</p>
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The board of trustees of BECS is working as a board and is unified in its vision. Currently, the board is focused on academic achievement gains, now that it has the school's new facility issue solved. The board is also focused on holding NHA to specific improvement plans as part of executing its contract. The board expects to be given specific strategic plans that will drive academic achievement. The board wants these types of reports from the principal and from NHA. The board insisted on the hiring of the new Dean of Instruction as one method of improving academic results. The board reports that it is giving the new dean (hired in April 2005) a chance to develop detailed plans with specific timelines and deliverables.

The board is still operating as a board of the whole and has no academic committee to relentlessly focus on the details of the school's academic data and results.

VISIT DATA

The Charter Schools Institute conducted the Second Year Visit at Brooklyn Excelsior Charter School on April 21, 2005. Listed below are the names and backgrounds of the individuals who conducted the visit:

SUSAN MILLER BARKER

Senior Vice President & Senior Fellow, CSI

Ms. Miller Barker is the Senior Vice President and Senior Fellow at the State University of New York's Charter Schools Institute. The former associate commissioner of education for charter schools in Massachusetts, Susan began her career as a classroom teacher, Arts in Education Director & Technology Coordinator in Indianapolis, Indiana winning an Excellence in Education Award in 1990. From there, Susan joined the Hudson Institute – a public policy research organization – serving as the Assistant Director of the Modern Red Schoolhouse Project researching and working with schools in Philadelphia, PA, Memphis, TN, Charlotte, NC, San Antonio, TX, and New York, NY. Susan holds a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Masters in Education from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. In addition to having completed doctoral coursework in Harvard's Urban Superintendent Program, and serving as guest lecturer at Butler University and Columbia University, Ms. Miller Barker holds a Masters from Harvard's Graduate School of Education in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy.

RON MILLER, Ph.D.

Vice President for Accountability, CSI

Ron was the educational accountability officer for the New York City Department of Education. After teaching grades 3 to 5 in New York City public schools for seven years, he joined the central offices of the New York City schools, where he conducted evaluative research and organizational studies. As Director of the Office of School Planning and Accountability, he worked with school leaders to develop their capacity to use data for school improvement. In this capacity he developed PASS, a school performance review system which was adopted in 600 city schools. Ron holds an AB degree from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology from Columbia University.

SUSAN SEYMOUR

Special Assistant to the Executive Director, CSI

Susan Seymour is the Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the Charter Schools Institute, State University of New York. In the past, Mrs. Seymour taught pre-kindergarten through 10th grade. From 1996 to 1999 she worked in the Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform as an analyst. There she assisted various state agencies, among others the banking department and the Office of Children and Family Services, in cutting "red tape" from their New

York State regulations. Interested in education reform, she joined the Charter Schools Institute in 1999. She received her B.S. from The University of Rochester and her M.A. from Manhattanville College concentrating in Special Education and Reading.

JOEY MERRILL GUSTAFSON
Founder & CEO, JM Consulting Inc.

Joey Merrill Gustafson's previous experiences include senior management at ChildrenFirst, Inc., a national corporate child care company, being the Assistant Head of School at a charter school in Massachusetts, Community Day Charter School, and doing education reform research at the Hudson Institute. She was also the education policy advisor to former New York City Mayor Giuliani, and holds an MBA from Boston University and a B.A. from Georgetown University.