



Charter Schools Institute
State University of New York

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE
AS TO THE APPLICATION FOR CHARTER
RENEWAL OF THE BRONX PREPARATORY
CHARTER SCHOOL**

FEBRUARY 8, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 (the “Act”) authorizes the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the “Board of Trustees”) to grant charters for the purpose of organizing and operating independent and autonomous public charter schools. Charter schools provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- improve student learning and achievement;
- increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system;
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; and
- provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.¹

In order to assist the Board of Trustees in their responsibilities under the Act, the Board of Trustees authorized the establishment of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York (the “Institute”). Among its duties, the Institute is charged with evaluating charter schools’ applications for renewal and providing its resulting findings and recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

This report is the primary vehicle by which the Institute transmits to the Board of Trustees its findings and recommendations regarding a school’s renewal application, and more broadly, the merits of a school’s case for renewal. It has been created and issued pursuant to the “Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewals of Charters for State University Authorized Charter Schools” (the “State University Renewal Practices”).² More information regarding this report is contained in the “Reader’s Guide” that follows.

¹ See § 2850 of the Charter Schools Act of 1998.

²The State University Renewal Practices, Policies and Procedures (revised January 25, 2005) are available at www.newyorkcharters.org.

Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years. The Act prescribes the following requirements for a charter school renewal application:

- a report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;
- a detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements; and
- indications of parent and student satisfaction.³

The Institute's processes and procedures mirror these requirements and meet the objectives of the Act.⁴

As a charter authorizing entity, the Board of Trustees can renew a charter so long as the Trustees can make each of the following findings:

- the charter school described in the application meets the requirements of the Act and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- the applicant can demonstrate the ability to operate the school in an educationally and fiscally sound manner; and
- granting the application is likely to improve student learning and achievement and materially further the purposes of the Act.⁵

Where the Board of Trustees approve a renewal application, they are required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review.⁶ The Regents may approve or return the proposed charter to the Board of Trustees with the Regents' comments and recommendation. In the former case, the charter will then issue and become operational on the day the initial charter expires. In the latter case (return to the Board of Trustees), the Board of Trustees must review the returned proposed charter in light of the Regents' comments and respond by resubmitting the charter (with or without modification) to the Regents, or by abandoning the proposed charter. Should the Board of Trustees resubmit the charter, the Regents have thirty days to act to approve it. If they do not approve the proposed charter, it will be deemed approved and will issue by operation of law.⁷

³ § 2851(4) of the Act.

⁴ Further explication of these policies and procedures is available on the Charter Schools Institute's website. See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/howto/renewal.html>.

⁵ See § 2852(2) of the Act.

⁶ See § 2852(5) of the Act.

⁷ See §§ 2852(5-a) and (5-b) of the Act.

Process for Renewal

While that renewal process formally commences with submission of a renewal application, a school must work to make the case for renewal from the time it is chartered. From its inception, the school must build its case for renewal by setting educational goals and thereafter implementing a program that will allow them to meet those goals.

Under the State University's accountability cycle, a school that is chartered enters into a plan (the "Accountability Plan")⁸ setting forth the goals for the school's educational program (and other measures if the school desires) usually in the first year of the charter. Progress toward each goal is determined by specific measures. Both goals and measures, while tailored in part to each school's program, must be consistent with the Institute's written guidelines. When the Accountability Plan is in final form, it receives approval from the Institute.

Thereafter, the charter school is required to provide an annual update on its progress in meeting its Accountability Plan goals and measures (the "Accountability Plan Progress Report").⁹ This permits the school not only the ability to provide all stakeholders with a clear sense of the school's progress, but forces the school to focus on specific academic outcomes. In the same vein, both the Institute and the State Education Department conduct visits to the school on a periodic basis. The main purpose of the Institute's visits is to determine the progress the school is making in implementing successfully a rigorous academic program that will permit the school to meet its Accountability Plan goals and measures. Reports and debriefings for the school's Board or leadership team are designed to indicate the school's progress, its strengths and its weaknesses. Where possible, and where it is consistent with its oversight role, the Institute provides general advice as to potential avenues for improvement. To further assist the school in this regard, the Institute may contract with third-party, school inspection experts to conduct a comprehensive third-year visit to the school and to look specifically at the strength of the school's case for renewal at that point.

By the start of the fifth year of a school's charter (as set forth above), it must submit an application for charter renewal, setting forth the evidence required by law and the State University. Applicant charter schools are asked to formulate and report evidence of success in answer to four renewal questions:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

⁸ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/reports.html> for detailed information on Accountability Plan guidelines.

⁹ See <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/resource/Model%20Progress%20Report1.pdf> for a model Accountability Plan Progress Report.

The application is reviewed by Institute staff. The staff also conducts a desk audit to both gather additional evidence as well as verify the evidence the school has submitted. This audit includes examination of the school's charter, including amendments, Accountability Plan, Accountability Plan Progress Reports, Annual Reports and internal documents (such as school handbooks, policies, memos, newsletters, and Board meeting minutes). Institute staff also examines audit reports, budget materials, and reports generated over the term of the school's charter both by the Institute and the State Education Department.

Thereafter, the Institute conducts a multi-day site visit to the school. Based on a review of each school's application for charter renewal, a lead member of the Institute's renewal visit team works with the school's leadership to design a visit schedule and request any additional documentation the team may require to ensure that analysis of the school's progress is complete (professional development plans, special education plans, school newsletters, *etc.*). Renewal visit team members visit classes, observe lessons, examine student work, sit in on school meetings, interview staff members and speak informally with students. In addition, the team conducts extensive interviews with the school's board of trustees and administrators.

The evidence that the Institute gathers is structured by a set of benchmarks that are grouped under the four renewal application questions listed above. These benchmarks are linked to the accountability plan structure and the charter renewal requirements in the Act; many are also based on the correlates of effective schools.¹⁰

Following the visit, the Institute's renewal team finalizes the analysis of all evidence generated regarding the school's performance. The Institute's renewal benchmarks are discussed and the lead writer uses the team's evidence and analysis to generate comments under each renewal benchmark. The completed benchmarks present a focus for discussion and a summary of the findings. The benchmarks are not used as a scorecard, do not have equal weight, and support but do not individually or in limited combination provide the aggregate analysis required for the final renewal recommendation.

The Institute then prepares a draft report and provides a copy to the school for its review and comment. The draft contains the findings, discussion and the evidence base for those findings, but does not contain a recommendation. Upon receiving a school's comments, the Institute reviews its draft, makes any changes it determines are necessary and appropriate and determines its findings in their final form. The report is then finalized, recommendations are included, and copies are provided to the members of the Committee on Charter Schools, the other members of the Board of Trustees and the schools themselves. This report is the product of that process.

¹⁰ See <http://www.effectiveschools.com>.

READER'S GUIDE

This renewal report contains the following sections: Introduction, Reader's Guide, School Description, Recommendations and Executive Summary, Findings and Discussion and completed Renewal Benchmarks. As this guide, the Introduction, and School Description speak for themselves, no guidance is provided for these sections. Guidance as to the remaining sections is set forth below.

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Institute's Recommendations are the end result of its review process. In this section, the Institute provides not only its recommendation as to whether the charter should be renewed, but the recommended terms of any renewal, *i.e.*, short or long-term, grades and number of students it is recommended the school be authorized to serve, conditions under which the charter is renewed, *etc.* Following the recommendations themselves is a short executive summary that lays out in abbreviated form reasons for the recommendation as well as the findings that support the recommendation.

Pursuant to the State University Renewal Practices, the recommendations made by the Institute can take the following forms.

- *Early renewal*: available to schools in the fourth year of the charter that can at that point make a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal. Schools that gain early renewal will then have five full years of instruction before facing renewal again, thus allowing them to concentrate on instruction and providing them with more ready access to capital markets.
- *Short-term planning year renewal*: available to schools that have taken one or more planning years. These schools will be able with limited review to obtain renewal in order to allow them to gather at least four full years of data before facing a full-blown renewal review.
- *Renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year. Schools that have a compelling and unambiguous case for renewal will be eligible for renewal term of five years.
- *Renewal with conditions*: available to schools that 1) have a compelling and unambiguous educational record of success but that have material legal, fiscal or organizational deficiencies that practically cannot be completely corrected by the time of renewal — so long as such deficiencies are not fatal to a determination that the school is fiscally, legally and organizationally sound, or 2) have demonstrated sufficient academic performance for renewal, but require conditions to improve the academic

program. Such conditions may include but are not limited to restrictions on the number of students and grades served.

- *Short-term renewal*: available to schools in their fifth year that present an ambiguous or mixed record of educational achievement, but that have effectively implemented measures to correct those deficiencies and such measures are likely to lead to educational success and students' academic improvement with additional time. Typically, but not always, short-term renewal will be for two years. A short-term renewal may also be coupled with conditions relating to organizational, fiscal or legal deficiencies.
- *Restructuring renewal*: available to schools that have not presented a case for renewal of any kind, but that are voluntarily willing to enter into a restructuring plan whereby the current school would cease instruction at the end of the school's final year of instruction under the current charter and its Board of Trustees would wind up operations of the school. Thereafter, the school's Board would legally commit itself to implementing a wholesale restructuring of the education corporation, including a new Board of Trustees, administrative team, academic program, enrollment and organizational structure, and potentially a new location, which school then could meet and exceed state standards and all the requirements of the Act. Once restructured the education corporation would have authority to recommence instruction.
- *Non-renewal*: where a school does not present a case for renewal (short term, conditional, or otherwise), the charter will not be renewed and the charter will be terminated upon its expiration.

In addition to discussing the recommendations themselves (and any conditions made part of those recommendations), the executive summary also contains the findings required by subdivision 2852(2) of the Education Law, including whether the school, if renewed, is likely to improve student learning and achievement.

2. Finding and Discussion

The findings are grouped and separated into four sections corresponding to the four questions that a charter school seeking renewal must answer and must provide evidence supporting its answer. They are:

- Is the school an academic success?
- Is the school a viable and effective organization?
- Is the school fiscally sound?
- If the school's charter is renewed, what are its future plans?

Below each group of findings is a summary of the evidence supporting the finding. This evidence is a synthesis of information gathered over the life of the school's charter and is analyzed through the lens of the Institute's Renewal Benchmarks (available on the Institute's website).

The ordering of the findings—with those regarding a school's academic performance and outcomes placed first—reflect the fact that renewal of a State University authorized charter is primarily based on a school's progress towards performance-based goals that the charter school and the Institute agreed to in the school's Accountability Plan. However, while success in meeting these goals is the primary determining factor, the school's ability to demonstrate that its educational program as implemented is effective and that the organization is viable, fiscally stable and in compliance with applicable law are also important factors. So, too, the school must be able to show that its plans for the charter renewal term are feasible, reasonable and most of all achievable.

3. Renewal Benchmarks

The Renewal Benchmark section contains each renewal benchmark together with a review of the pertinent evidence gathered during the renewal cycle. As noted earlier, the benchmarks, similar to the findings, are grouped under the four renewal questions.

SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Bronx Preparatory Charter School (“Bronx Prep”), approved by the State University Board of Trustees in January 2000, and by the Board of Regents in March, opened in August of that year. For the 2001-2002 school year, the school enrolled 150 students in grades 5-7. Currently, the school enrolls 370 students in grades 5-10.

The mission of the Bronx Preparatory Charter School is to prepare under-served middle and high school students for higher education, civic involvement and lifelong success through a structured, caring environment of high academic expectations.

Bronx Preparatory Charter School seeks to grade men and women who (1) think critically; (2) have attained strong skills in mathematics, language, literature, history, science, technology and the arts; and (3) are committed to a lifetime of learning and civic involvement. The school will empower students through intellectual and conduct standards – building on their promise, as they prepare for college, career, and citizenship.

Bronx Prep emphasizes reading and math skills instruction in the middle school years, while preparing students to think critically and creatively as they approach high school. The school ensures that upper school students’ curriculum is rich in core academic areas, but also expansive to include even more rigorous advanced instruction in science, history and the arts. The school sets the expectation that all of its students will attend college, and seeks to build a nurturing school community and culture of achievement, developed in deliberate collaboration with parents, guardians, and community.

The school finalized its transition to a new Principal, the second since the school opened, in the summer of 2004, and the school’s Board of Trustees continues to provide strong and effective oversight. The Board has had the same president, secretary and treasurer since the school’s inception. A significant example of the Board’s ability to plan and govern is the school’s new building on Third Avenue in the Bronx. The building represents the completion of Phase I of the building project. Phase II will culminate in the additional space needed to expand the school to include 11th and 12th grades.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: The Charter Schools Institute recommends that the State University Board of Trustees approve the application for renewal of the Bronx Preparatory Charter School (Bronx Prep) and authorize the renewal of the charter for Bronx Prep for a period of five years consistent with the terms of the renewal application, except that for any part of the 2004-05 school year that such renewal period is operative, the school shall have authority to provide instruction to such grades and such numbers of students as it is authorized in such school year to serve pursuant to its present charter.

Summary Discussion

Bronx Preparatory Charter School is located in the South Bronx and currently serves 370 students in grades five through 10. Pursuant to its renewal application, Bronx Prep seeks a five-year renewal of its charter under which it would expand by one grade in each successive year until reaching grade 12 in 2006-07 and serving a maximum of 700 students.

In order for the Charter Schools Institute to recommend that a charter school authorized by the State University Board of Trustees be awarded a five-year renewal of its charter, a school must show that it has met its Accountability Plan measures and goals or at least made consistent and meaningful progress towards meeting those outcome measures and goals. It must also demonstrate that it is, at the time of renewal, a fiscally and organizationally sound entity and meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law. Based on the findings and evidence gathered to date, the Institute has determined that Bronx Prep is eligible for a five-year renewal and recommends that the State University Trustees approve Bronx Prep's renewal application and authorize renewal of the charter for that five-year period.

Bronx Prep has exceeded most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts and mathematics. In 2004, the school exceeded the State Education Commissioner's standard on the eighth-grade state tests. Most noteworthy is Bronx Prep's consistently strong performance on the eighth-grade state tests in comparison to Community School District 9. In its absolute level of performance on the eighth-grade state examinations, Bronx Prep has exceeded the criterion of success set in its outcome measures. In its comparative level of performance on the eighth-grade state examinations, Bronx Prep has substantially outperformed Community School District (CSD) 9. (Results are mixed on the value-added to student learning based on a norm-referenced test, the Stanford 9). As a whole, the student achievement data the school has amassed during its first four years of operation indicates that the school has significantly improved student learning and achievement, and the school is in good standing under No Child Left Behind.

At the time of the renewal visit in September of 2004, the school generally had effective systems and programs in place that provide a basis for concluding (together with the outcome data noted above) that the school would, if approved for renewal, likely continue to improve student learning and achievement, including a rigorous curriculum and comprehensive set of structures for faculty development. In addition, the school has benefited from consistent leadership at the Executive Director, Principal and Board levels. The school's Executive Director developed and submitted the original application to establish Bronx Prep. Six of the original trustees remain on the Board, and the Board has successfully and thoughtfully transitioned to its second Principal in the school's fifth year. The Board has guided the school in a successful effort to fund and build a new facility, attracting substantial philanthropic support. The first stage of that facility was completed on time and on budget, and the school moved into it just prior to the opening of school last fall. The school has maintained overall financial health, and is a viable and effective organization. Finally, parents are enthusiastic about the school, and the school maintains a long waiting list and has a sound record of compliance with applicable law.

Accordingly, the Institute recommends that, as the school is an educationally and fiscally sound organization, is likely to continue to improve student learning and achievement, and meets the requirements of the Charter Schools Act and applicable law, the State University Board of Trustees approve Bronx Prep's application for charter renewal and authorize renewal of the school's charter for a full five-year period.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

- Finding 1: The school's student performance data indicate that teachers at Bronx Preparatory Charter School have used the school's curriculum to provide effective instruction. The middle school curriculum has been refined over time and has proven to be an effective driver of student achievement. The upper school curriculum is in the early stages of a similar process. Its effectiveness as a driver of student achievement cannot yet be evaluated.*
- Finding 2: Bronx Preparatory Charter School has developed a clear, shared organizational sense not only of what to teach, but also of how to teach it. The consistency of this method appears to be an effective and strong facilitator of student achievement. Instruction is purposeful and consistently well-prepared. Students exhibit an exceptional level of engagement and commitment to learning throughout the school.*
- Finding 3: The school has an integrated strategy to meet the needs of students who learn differently whether they are students with special education needs, English-language learners, or students at-risk of academic failure. The school has, over the course of the initial charter, made significant strides in administering and providing special education, ESL and Title I programs and services. In addition, the school has addressed all regulatory compliance issues in the area of special education and is in full compliance according to the New York State Education Department.*
- Finding 4: Teachers at Bronx Preparatory Charter School display an extraordinary commitment to their students and to the students' academic success. Teachers possess sound subject-area knowledge and deliver effective instruction.*
- Finding 5: Bronx Preparatory Charter School has made several key program changes based on a variety of data including school-developed internal assessments, nationally norm-referenced tests, and New York State and City assessments. The use of monthly pre- and post-tests in literacy and math appears to be particularly effective; assessments in other disciplines remain more decentralized. Additional opportunities exist for further use of data.*
- Finding 6: Professional development is an essential element in the school's ability to provide effective instruction, exemplified by the fact that both the*

Principal and Assistant Principal teach. Administrators and teachers seek and offer constructive criticism on the craft of teaching as a part of their daily work.

Finding 7: The school's culture is outstanding. Students are orderly, consistently engaged, on-task and joyful in learning. Students themselves place a high value on character and achievement.

As stated earlier, Bronx Preparatory Charter School has exceeded most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. In its absolute level of performance on the eighth-grade state examinations, Bronx Prep has exceeded the criterion of success set in its outcome measures. In 2002-03 the school did not meet its absolute objectives in ELA and mathematics for eighth graders. However, in 2003-04, the school made notable progress in each subject to surpass the goals set in its Accountability Plan. In its comparative level of performance on the eighth grade examinations, Bronx Prep has consistently outperformed CSD 9. In fact, the data indicates that the school is adding greater value to student learning than CSD 9 to its middle school students. The school's results, however, are mixed on the value-added to student learning based on a norm-referenced test (the Stanford 9). In the one year for which results could be calculated, the average score of each cohort from spring to spring declined slightly in reading and increased slightly in math. Given such performance, however, students on average still scored above grade level in reading and math.

Similar to its eighth grade students' performance, the school's seventh grade students also exhibited strong performance based on similar measures. Ninth grade students surpassed the school's outcome measure for passing the Math A Regents Examination, and performed notably on the Chemistry Regents. The school acknowledges some disappointing results for its fifth and sixth grade students, but has instituted instructional practices and programs to provide support for those students.

Bronx Preparatory Charter School is a school whose students strive to meet its academic and behavioral expectations, and whose teachers embody its mission to prepare under-served middle and high school students for higher education, civic involvement and lifelong success through a structured, caring environment of high academic expectations. Teachers throughout the school are consistently prepared to provide rigorous instruction, and receive ongoing professional development to hone their skills through the school's full-time staff developer. A culture of mutual respect has been established by both

teachers and students during the course of the school's initial charter period, and students are attentive and engaged in their learning.

In addition, the school provides support for students with special academic needs, such as students with disabilities, students who are English language learners and students most at-risk of academic failure through its Learning Enrichment Team (LET). During its initial charter period, the school has made monumental strides in addressing all students' needs. The school's staff initially did not include a special educator, and the school contracted for all special services. At the time of the renewal visit, Bronx Prep's staff included a team of professionals, including special educators, who provide professional development and instructional support to classroom teachers.

Bronx Preparatory Charter School continues to base instruction on its college preparatory curriculum, and is working to ensure that the upper school curriculum reflects the strengths of the middle school curriculum. As demonstrated by student performance, the school has historically had a strong program in literacy and numeracy, and is now expanding that trend in the area of science by adding Regents level Chemistry and Biology. In keeping with the focus on college preparation, the school has also instituted PSAT verbal and math courses. The school has put in place an internal assessment system to evaluate the delivery of instruction. The system includes weekly teacher-made tests and monthly archived pre- and post-tests, aligned to the state standards and derived from the curriculum. While this system allows the administration to monitor teacher preparation and delivery, as well as alignment, the student performance data does not yet appear to be used systemically or systematically as the basis for instructional change.

2. Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Finding 1: The focus on going to college is evident throughout the school, and upper school students speak with knowledge and sophistication about the colleges they aspire to attend.

Finding 2: The school provides an array of programs in the performing and visual arts that appear likely to promote the "team work, thinking skills and competitive spirit" envisioned in the school's renewal application.

Finding 3: Parents and students are highly satisfied with the school. Interviews with both students and parents indicate that the school benefits from the word-of-mouth advertising by satisfied parents whose children attend the school.

Finding 4: The size of the school's Board of Trustees is large, but has a committee/subcommittee structure that leverages the knowledge, skills and expertise of its members in a highly effective manner. Trustees have been, and continue to be, relentless in their focus on student achievement, organizational stability, sustainability, and continued growth and improvement.

Finding 5: Based on evidence to date and a review of relevant policies, Board minutes and interviews, the school appears to have been, and presently appears to be, generally in substantial compliance with the applicable law, rules and regulation, and the provisions in its charter.

It is evident from observations and student interviews that Bronx Preparatory Charter School has a focus on students successfully completing high school and entering a postsecondary educational institution, preferably a four-year college. Both students and parents espoused this goal without hesitation. Students, in fact, not only referred to the goal, but were highly articulate about the various colleges they aspired to attend. College pennants graced the hallways, and classes are named after universities. Headings on student papers include not only student names, but the name of the university or class to which they belong.

Parent satisfaction with the school is reflected in the fact that the school allocates limited funds for advertising; recruitment occurs primarily through word of mouth - parents refer other parents. Based on parent responses to the annual school climate survey and interviews, parents believe that the school has a strong academic program; has helped their children to develop into well-adjusted individuals who feel confident about their abilities to learn; and has provided them with opportunities to receive information and express their views on school matters. Parents were also pleased that the school's program included not only academic instruction but opportunities for students to participate in the arts.

Bronx Prep continues to provide fine arts instruction to its students to complement their academic development. Since its opening, the school has offered instruction in a variety of fine and performing arts, such as choir, theater, instruments [piano, string, percussion and guitar], theater and step dancing. In fact, student performance skills are incorporated as one goal of the school's Accountability Plan, and in the spring of 2004, 70 percent – 100 percent of the school's seventh through ninth grade students scored at level three or four when rated on presentation, preparation and technique.

The school's Board of Trustees remains focused on ensuring that the school has the necessary resources to achieve its mission and goals, and that the school's infrastructure is stable. The Board is large, with 19 members, but structured in a way to use the diverse skills and background experiences of its members in an effective manner. Six of the nineteen Trustees were part of the school's founding Board, and function as stabilizing forces for the Board. Student achievement is the constant driving force behind the Board's work, and is consistently reinforced by the inclusion of the school's Executive Director on the Board of Trustees. Each member of the school's Board is also a member of the school's 501(c) (3) affiliate, The Friends of Bronx Prep. In many situations, such an arrangement might result in issues regarding conflicts-of-interest. However, due to the integrity of its members, this arrangement has resulted in greater vigilance to ensure that conflicts do not occur.

3. Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Finding 1: Bronx Preparatory Charter School is a viable fiscal entity in strong financial condition with appropriate systems and controls in place.

The school completed the 2003-04 year in strong financial condition. The school has maintained positive fund balances and adequate cash flow. The school's operating expenses per student declined for its first three years, while per pupil revenues have increased in each year. Although it relied heavily on fundraising during its first four years, the school has become less reliant on private fundraising on a per-pupil basis.

The school has established appropriate processes and controls related to cash receipts, payroll and other disbursements, procurement and safeguarding of assets. The school's annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. Management letter comments issued by the school's independent certified public accountant were addressed in a timely fashion.

4. What Are the School's Plans for the Renewal Period and Are They Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?

Finding 1: If Bronx Preparatory Charter School's charter is renewed, the school intends to expand by adding 11th and 12th grades and reaching an enrollment of 700 students. The growth would allow the school to fulfill

its goal of establishing a college preparatory middle and high school. The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.¹¹

Finding 2: Bronx Preparatory Charter School's Board of Trustees anticipate that the Board may need to grow somewhat in number and possibly alter its structure in order to provide the most effective governance for the school as it grows. The plans in this area are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

Finding 3: The school has provided a fiscal plan that includes a discussion of how future enrollment and facility plans are supported and/or impacted for the term of its next charter. The fiscal plan reflects sound use of financial resources that support academic program needs. The plan is reasonable, feasible and achievable.

If renewed, Bronx Preparatory Charter School intends to maintain its rigorous and structured academic program at the middle school level which includes a strong emphasis on English Language Arts and mathematics, and expand to include the 11th and 12th grades. The upper school's academic program will encompass the core secondary academic courses, as well as advanced coursework in the sciences. The school will also offer other challenging courses in the arts. The school will continue to provide the necessary professional development so its teachers will employ the appropriate instructional strategies to address individual student learning styles and to ensure students are prepared to earn a Regents, Regents with Distinction, or Bronx Prep with Distinction diploma.

The school will continue to use the infrastructure currently established in the area of student order and discipline in order for the environment to continue to be conducive to student learning. That infrastructure includes the use of the titles "scholars" and "visionaries" for the school's seventh/eighth and ninth/tenth grade students, respectively. The structure will grow to include "luminaries" in 11th and 12th grades. Teachers will continue to use STEPS (Sit up straight, Track the speaker, Enrich the class, Pay attention, and Show you understand), scholar dollars, and visionary reports, in addition to consistent reinforcement of excellent academic and social performance, as part of their repertoire of tools to achieve success.

At the time of the renewal visit, Bronx Prep's Board of Trustees was keenly aware that if the school's charter is renewed and the school

¹¹ The Accountability Plan as submitted in the renewal application is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State's testing regimen or revisions to the Institute's Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

continues to grow, it will face new challenges in ensuring that the school has the necessary leadership, curricular, fiscal and other resources necessary for students to attain the school's high goals. To address the challenges, the Board indicated that it may be necessary for the Board to possibly modify its structure and/or grow in number to include individuals who possess other areas of expertise. The Board has demonstrated its singular focus on student achievement as its driving force over the course of the school's initial charter, and has indicated its commitment to continue to ensure stability and continuity in the school's program.

The school is in strong financial position and should remain that way through the end of the last year of its initial charter period. The school's stability is enhanced by the support of the Friend's of Bronx Prep Foundation and its securing of a permanent facility. The Institute finds that the school's financial position during the term of a future charter should remain strong assuming the continued demand for enrollment in the school.

When Phase II of the school's construction plan is complete, it will have sufficient space for the projected enrollment of 700 students. Construction is anticipated to be complete during the spring of 2005. Historically, the school has enrolled more students than approved (but within the enrollment collar provided in its charter). This practice has provided a cushion against student attrition. The school plans to continue this practice, which is a reasonable approach. In addition, the school has a waiting list and has not previously needed to spend excessive resources on student recruiting. The combination of the school's academic success to date as well as its new facility will undoubtedly be attractive recruiting tools.

The school will continue to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts. The school has established a track record of meeting its financial obligations, including a period during which its per pupil revenue had declined from the previous year (2003-04). In addition, the school has prudently included a capital maintenance reserve to provide for the maintenance needs of the new facility not provided for in maintenance contracts or other line items of the operating budget.

RENEWAL BENCHMARKS

Evidence Category	Benchmarks	
<p>Renewal Question 1</p> <p>Is the School an Academic Success?</p>		
<p>Benchmark 1A</p> <p>Academic Attainment & Improvement</p>	<p>1A.1.1</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>1A.1.2</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>1A.1.3</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>1A.1.4</p>	<p>NCLB Measure: The school has made adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.</p>
	<p>1A.1.5</p>	<p>Unique Academic Measures: The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the outcome measures contained in its Accountability Plan.</p>

Academic Attainment & Improvement

Bronx Preparatory Charter School has exceeded most of its goals on key outcome measures in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. Because the school has only enrolled an eighth grade for a limited time, and because of a decision to change standardized tests, data are only available for two years. In 2004, the school exceeded the State Education Commissioner’s standard on the eighth-grade state tests. Most noteworthy is Bronx Prep’s consistently strong performance on the eighth grade state tests in comparison to Community School District 9.

In its absolute level of performance on the eighth grade state examinations, Bronx Prep has exceeded the criterion of success set in its outcome measures. In 2002-03, the school did not meet its absolute objectives on the state ELA and mathematics examinations for eighth graders. However, in 2003-04, Bronx Prep made notable progress in each subject to surpass the goals set in its Accountability Plan. Particularly significant is the fact that no students scored at Level 1 (severely deficient) on either state examination.

In its comparative level of performance on the eighth-grade state examinations, Bronx Prep has substantially outperformed CSD 9. In the two years in which Bronx Prep has administered the two state exams, it has enabled almost twice as many of its students to become proficient as CSD 9. Based on one of its supplemental outcome measures, the school demonstrates that it is adding greater value to student learning than CSD 9 to its middle school students. In comparing the average score of students on fourth grade exams (before they entered Bronx Prep) and their current scores on city and state exams, the data show that more Bronx Prep students are becoming proficient as they move through the middle school grades, while fewer CSD 9 students are remaining proficient.

In contrast, results are mixed on the value-added to student learning based on a norm-referenced test (the Stanford 9). In the one year for which results can be calculated,¹² the average score of each cohort from spring to spring declined slightly in reading and increased slightly in math, falling short of the ambitious reading and math Accountability Plan value-added outcome measures it had set. One of four grades met the objective in reading; two of four met it in math. On the other hand, despite the general absence of gains, students on average still scored above grade level in reading (51st percentile) and math (76th percentile). Students were near the ceiling of the long-term gains Bronx Prep had established for itself in the math outcome measure.

In addition to presenting data on these outcome measures, Bronx Prep's renewal application reviews its performance by grade level. Besides the eighth grade results, the application also indicates strong performance for the seventh grade, based on similar measures. In addition, the school reports success in the pass rate of the ninth grade's Math A Regents Examination, surpassing its stated outcome measure, as well as encouraging initial outcomes for the Chemistry Regents. The school acknowledges some disappointing results for the fifth and sixth grades, and indicates that it will initiate remedial action to improve instruction and support the students who entered Bronx Prep more recently.

Accountability Plan Outcome Measures

In its Accountability Plan, Bronx Preparatory Charter School set outcome measures to demonstrate its academic success in the key subjects of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, as well as science and social studies. The outcome measures include the following three required types: 1) the absolute level of student performance on state examinations; 2) the comparative level of student performance on state examinations; and 3) the value-added to student learning according to year-to-year comparisons of student cohort performance on a school-selected standardized test.

¹² In its renewal application, Bronx Prep reports a gain in the average score of cohorts when calculating fall to spring results within the same school year. Typically, fall to spring gains are greater than those for spring to spring, because of a summer fall-off in scores and initial unfamiliarity with the test. In order to track students' achievement more seamlessly over time, longitudinal comparisons from spring to spring are preferred.

The following tables indicate the specific outcomes Bronx Prep set for itself accompanied by its annual results.¹³

In addition to being held to these accountability measures, Bronx Prep is expected, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to make adequate yearly progress toward enabling all students to score at the proficient level on the state ELA and math examinations. In holding charter schools to the same standards as other public schools, the state issues a school accountability report. Bronx Prep's accountability status in the most recent report is indicated below. Besides the three required outcome measures and the NCLB outcome measure, the school may also have included additional self-selected academic outcome measures as part of its Accountability Plan. These various outcome measures constitute the renewal benchmarks for academic attainment and improvement.

Absolute Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	Eighth grade students at Bronx Prep will meet the Commissioner's reading performance standard, which is a school performance index of 150 .	8	No students in grade	No students in grade	127	160
Math	Eighth grade students at Bronx Prep will meet the Commissioner's mathematics performance standard, which is a school performance index of 150 .	8	No students in grade	No students in grade	136	171
Science	Seventy-five percent of Bronx Prep 8 th graders will receive a rating of proficient or better on the NY State science exam.	8	No students in grade	No students in grade	N/A	56.1%
Social Studies	Seventy-five percent of Bronx Prep 8 th graders will receive a rating of proficient or better on the NY State history exam.	8	No students in grade	No students in grade	N/A	N/A

¹³ Please note: since Bronx Prep has had an eighth grade for two years, it administered the state examinations for the first time in 2002-03. Social studies and science test scores are not available. Because the school changed norm-referenced tests in 2002-03, spring-to-spring value-added cohort results are only available for the 2003-04 school year.

Comparative Level of Performance on State Examinations

Accountability Plan		Results					
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grade	Comparison	School Year			
				2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
ELA	On the NYC criterion-referenced reading test for grades 5-7 and on the NY State 8 th grade ELA exam, a greater percentage of Bronx Prep students will score at proficient and advanced levels than will their peers in NYC District 9.	5-8	Bronx Prep	N/A	N/A	44.7%	47.4%
			CSD 9	N/A	N/A	20.4%	20.9%
Math	On the NYC criterion-referenced mathematics test for grades 5-7 and on the NY State 8 th grade mathematics exam, a greater percentage of Bronx Prep students will score at proficient and advanced levels than will their peers in the NYC District 9.	5-8	Bronx Prep	N/A	N/A	52.2%	53.1%
			CSD 9	N/A	N/A	18.0%	21.7%
Science	On the NY State 8 th grade science exam, a greater percentage of Bronx Prep students will score at proficient and advanced levels than will their peers in NYC District 9.	8	Bronx Prep	No students in grade	No students in grade	N/A	56.1%
			CSD 9	N/A	N/A	N/A	18.6%
Social Studies	On the NY State 8 th grade history exam, a greater percentage of Bronx Prep students will score at proficient and advanced levels than will their peers in NYC District 9.	8	Bronx Prep	No students in grade	No students in grade	N/A	N/A
			CSD 9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Value-Added to Student Learning According to Spring-to-Spring Cohort Gains

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subject	Outcome Measure	Grades	NCE Increase from Previous School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading	In each cohort of Bronx Prep students, the average score on the Stanford 9 nationally normed reading test will increase by 5 NCEs a year until the average NCE of the cohort is 70 (grades 5-10).	6	--	N/A	N/A	(-1.5)
		7	--			(-6.1)
		8	--			0.9
		9	--			5.1
Math	In each cohort of Bronx Prep students, the average score on the Stanford 9 nationally normed mathematics test will increase by 5 NCEs a year until the average NCE of the cohort is 70 (grades 5-10).	6	--	N/A	N/A	(-0.9)
		7	--			4.8
		8	--			(-4.8)
		9	--			9.7

Note: Bronx Prep administered the CTBS test through spring 2002 and began administering the Stanford 9 in fall 2002. Year-to-year comparisons are based on the spring administrations of the test.

Adequate Yearly Progress as Required by NCLB

The State Education Department's School Accountability Report states Bronx Prep's 2003-04 School Accountability Status: *Charter School in Good Standing*, which indicates that the school has not failed to make adequate yearly progress for two successive years.

Student Achievement According to Unique Academic Measures

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subjects	Outcome Measure	Grades	Comparison	Difference in Average Scale Score from Scoring at Level 3		
				Fourth Grade	Spring 2004	Change
ELA	Each year in each cohort the average scale score of Bronx Prep students will improve in relation to Level 3 on the NYC and NY State ELA exams. This measure is designed to assess student growth over time (and presented as a comparison to CSD 9).	5	Bx Prep	(-4)	(-4)	0
			CSD 9	(-11)	(-19)	(-8)
		6	Bx Prep	6	(-3)	(-9)
			CSD 9	(-18)	(-33)	(-15)
		7	Bx Prep	0	9	9
			CSD 9	(-27)	(-37)	(-10)
		8	Bx Prep	(-16)	11	27
			CSD 9	(-30)	(-17)	13
Math	Each year in each cohort the average scale score of Bronx Prep students will improve in relation to Level 3 on the NYC and NY State mathematics exams. This measure is designed to assess student growth over time (and presented as a comparison to CSD 9).	5	Bx Prep	10	(-22)	(-32)
			CSD 9	3	(-30)	(-33)
		6	Bx Prep	9	11	2
			CSD 9	(-12)	(-30)	(-42)
		7	Bx Prep	6	11	5
			CSD 9	(-14)	(-39)	(-25)

Please note: the fourth grade scores represent the scores of students on state tests prior to entering Bronx Prep in the fifth grade. The fourth grade and spring 2004 scores are from the same students in each of Bronx Prep's grade-level cohorts; the matched CSD 9 scores are likely to be from somewhat different students, since student turnover is not taken into account.

Math results for eighth graders are not included.

Accountability Plan		Results	
Subjects	Outcome Measure	Grades	School Year
			2003-04
ELA	70% of seventh, ninth, and tenth grade students will receive an average rating of proficient or better on a collection of writing samples.	7 9 10	51% of the seventh graders received a rating of proficient or better; however, the validity and reliability of the scoring rubric could not be determined. The other grades are not reported.
Math	Each year, 70% of Bronx Prep students in grades 5-7 will receive a proficient rating on a school-based logical thinking and problem-solving test.	5 6 7	46% of the fifth graders, 74% of the sixth graders, and 61% of the seventh graders received a rating of proficient or better; however, the validity and reliability of the scoring rubric could not be determined.
Science	70% of seventh grade students will receive a rating of proficient or better on a scientific investigation demonstrating the steps of the scientific method and an understanding of one major scientific concept...	7	84% of the seventh graders received a rating of proficient or better; however, the validity and reliability of the scoring rubric could not be determined
History	70% of seventh grade students will receive a rating of proficient or better on a five-paragraph essay responding to a document-based question...	7	79% of the seventh graders received a rating of proficient or better; however, the validity and reliability of the scoring rubric could not be determined

Accountability Plan		Results				
Subjects	Outcome Measure	Grade	School Year			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Math	60% of Bronx Prep students will pass the Math A Regents exam by the end of their ninth grade.	9	No students in grade	No students in grade	No students in grade	78%

<p>Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>1B</p> <p>The school effectively and systematically uses assessment and evaluation data to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>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.</p> <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. <p>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 knowledge and skills.</p>
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Bronx Prep has a firmly-established internal assessment system in place for evaluating the delivery of instruction. Assessments, consisting of weekly teacher-made tests and monthly archived pre- and post-tests, are aligned to the state standards and derived from the curriculum. By regularly reviewing the content and format of the tests, the administration ensures that teachers provide instruction at the right pace and that the instruction reflects the state standards. While the administration’s monitoring of the preparation and delivery of classroom tests is an effective tool for aligning instruction across the grades and to the state standards, the results of the tests do not appear to be used systematically or systemically as the basis for instructional change.

Teachers did not report reviewing student performance of tests with administrators. They did not indicate that they use such data as a feedback mechanism for self-evaluation to determine if their instruction of a particular topic has been effective in enabling students in general to acquire new skills or competencies. While teachers reported using test data for making promotional decisions, there was no evidence that test data were used for identifying students at risk of academic failure at the beginning of the year or for monitoring their progress.

The staff reported that the school has a renewed interest in focusing on writing instruction and on regularly evaluating student writing. Literacy department discussions have ensured that expectations of writing performance are spiraled

through the grades and writing rubrics are under development. Indeed, in reviewing student work samples, inspectors did not find evidence of student writing being systematically evaluated.

Bronx Prep has used standardized test data for making programmatic decisions and in support of school improvement efforts. For example, the administration determined the need for revamping the literacy curriculum based on results of the 2003 state ELA test. The school leadership's evaluation of teachers included the consideration of student performance on the ELA and math tests of the New York City testing program. The school reports that it is providing remediation to fifth and sixth grade students, because of their weak performance on last year's city tests.

The school administration regularly provides assessment data to the school's Board of Trustees, whose primary education program committee is an accountability committee, which uses the data to focus on the results of the instructional program. On the other hand, parents did not report being aware of test data of overall school performance or of their own children. They indicated that teachers talked to them about effort and progress.

Results of the norm-referenced tests (the Stanford 9) and school-developed rubric-based proficiency tests in each academic subject appear to have been used mostly for external reporting. There was no evidence that teachers use either of these tests for determining general instructional effectiveness or for specific individual diagnosis. Bronx Prep has plans for revamping the rubric-based assessments

<p>Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>1C</p> <p>The school has a clearly defined quality curriculum that prepares students to meet State performance 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>
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The school's student performance data indicates that teachers at Bronx Preparatory Charter School have provided effective instruction based upon the school's approved curriculum. Bronx Preparatory Charter School is aware, however, that it has historically had a slightly stronger program in literacy and mathematics. The middle grades are clearly a success, but the school is embarking on an ambitious expansion of its program and success in the earlier grades does not guarantee success in the later. Although the curriculum overview was available, a detailed document setting out the curriculum by subject and grade for grades 10 through 12 was not available at the time of the renewal visit.

The new Principal, however, has a strong background in history and will use that to strengthen the school's curriculum in the area of social studies. The school also has instituted Regents-level courses in Chemistry and Biology, and PSAT verbal and math courses. Evidence of the school's commitment to strengthening its curriculum in the areas of social studies and science was also apparent in the scheduling of instruction in history and science five times per week.

During classroom observations it was noted that teachers consistently identified the "Aim" on the blackboard and set out a multiple-step "Agenda" for the lesson. Agendas used consistently by all teachers on the blackboard force an intentionality and specificity of planning on teachers and all but guarantees (with proper supervision) that standards and curriculum are followed. These and other elements from a "plan" generated by the Staff Developer (see Benchmark 1G) resulted in consistent instructional and behavioral practices across classrooms. Teachers at Bronx Prep refer to a book, developed by the school's staff developer, as the "plan" and it is used as the basis for ongoing teacher training and development. The "plan" provided guidance to teachers in all aspects of instruction from classroom design and black (white) board set-up to lesson planning, behavior management and assessment.

As the school continues to grow through grade 12, it is critical that sufficient attention is given to crafting the details of the curricular content for the upper school, grades 9 - 12. Bronx Preparatory Charter School has, in fact, taken steps to institute practices that provide the infrastructure for enhancing the school's curricular content and implementation across the upper grades; the school's schedule includes cross-cutting weekly planning meetings for instructional staff by grade-level (e.g., middle school and high school meetings), department or subject area, and as a full staff to address relevant topics. In addition, the school's Learning Enhancement Team (LET) is included in curricular work and meets independently with grade level teams on a regular basis.

<p>Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<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>

At the time of the renewal visit, Bronx Preparatory Charter School’s second Principal was entering his first full school year. He was hired by the Board in the spring. The school’s new Principal brings extensive background from a successful charter school experience in New Jersey where he was an administrator and from New York City public schools where he was a history teacher. Based on these experiences, he is both familiar with the New York State Learning Standards and the significance of aligning the school’s curriculum with them in terms of instruction and student performance. He is also familiar with the goals and measures contained in the school’s Accountability Plan. He views the Accountability Plan as an instrument that provides both standards and direction for the school’s teachers. He is closely supported by the school’s staff developer and Assistant Principal in providing instructional leadership for staff regarding the relationship between assessment, curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers, in fact, viewed the staff developer as a critical force driving curriculum understanding and the improvement of classroom instruction. The staff developer was frequently seen in classrooms and provided immediate feedback to teachers about their pedagogy.

As the school's leader, however, the Principal was putting administrative and operative structures, approved by the school's Board, in place for the school as it moves into its next charter period, if renewed. The structures include one assistant Principal, at this point, with another planned once the school grows to include 12th grade; and grade level team leaders who may also double as "Department Chairs" in certain instances. The dual role is a function of the skills and knowledge of each individual. All of these positions, along with the staff that comprise the Learning Enhancement Team, the staff developer and the artistic director, are included in the school's "Cabinet." The Principal, in collaboration with the Cabinet, was also in the beginning stages of developing the school's "portfolio assessment system" in an effort to create a school-wide standard for excellence.

Classroom teachers at the school demonstrated a consistency in instructional format and classroom pedagogical practices that reflected the professional development foci provided by the staff developer and the "plan." Although the school may restructure the role of the staff developer during the upcoming school year, the school is aware of the significant role his services have played, and continue to play, in the school's ability to maintain the consistent performance of the instructional staff. At the time of this report, there were no plans to reduce the school's access to the copyrighted materials used in teaching his approach to new faculty. Although the school believes the practices have become institutionalized, with the more experienced teachers the school now attracts and hires, the school believes the "plan" may be somewhat less necessary. However, the "plan" is a key strength of the school, not as a general approach, but as an explicitly codified system that reliably acculturates new faculty and staff to the school's specific ways.

Students were engaged to varying levels throughout the school. In many classrooms, several different modes of interaction were observed during a class lesson; in other classrooms, lessons were didactic with a great deal of copying from the board into binders in a carefully prescribed manner. Concepts and skills were broken down into small, sequential components and taught precisely. Particularly impressive was the consistent use of student binders, where materials were stored away between tabs according to a practice consistent from classroom to classroom. Some teachers demonstrated greater facility with the school's selected pedagogical practices than others. Joyous moments were more frequent in the lower grades with their opportunities for chanting and singing. However, the emphasis on being on task, organized and following through on homework was paramount consistently throughout the school, especially in the upper grades. Instructional staff were constantly available to students for support and guidance.

Due to the timing of the renewal visit, (the first week of school), little evidence of student exposure to great writing was available—whether great essays, novels, speeches, editorials, or plays; whether contemporary or from the past. If indeed the school's curriculum did not include the study and analysis of great written works, and opportunities for students to frequently write, it would be inconsistent with the mission and philosophy of the school, which is to expect and achieve excellence.

The school has strategies in place to meet the needs of students who learn differently, be they students with disabilities, English language learners or students at risk of academic failure. The school has grown over the course of its initial charter in its ability to administer its special education, ESL and Title I programs. In its early years, the school did not have a special educator on staff and struggled to provide special education services and programs according to the students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). At the time of the renewal visit, the school enrolled 22 students with disabilities and had identified 18 students in need of English language learner (ELL)

services. Based on notification from the State Education Department, dated January 14, 2004, the school was in full compliance with all laws and regulations.

Bronx Prep uses an integrated model for administering and providing services to students at risk of academic failure, students who are ELL and students with disabilities. The integrated services are provided through the Learning Enhancement Team (LET) and address student needs in the areas of special education, English as a Second Language (ESL)/ELL, and Title I. This team of educators includes the school's Special Education Coordinator [who works for the InterActive Therapy Group (ITG) and deals with special education, Section 504 and Title I services], a special education teacher, and an ESL teacher. In addition, the school's Finance Director serves as its 504 Officer.

The LET provided professional development for all staff during the school's August orientation session regarding each specific area. With regard to special education, the August orientation focused on the IEP, and "Collaboration in the Inclusive Classroom" (August 12, 2004). In addition, the special educators are providing ongoing professional development to the instructional staff. Just prior to the renewal visit, the team conducted a workshop entitled "Modification and Accommodations" (August 27, 2004). The school can select from a menu of special education professional development topics available through the InterActive Therapy Group. The Special Education Coordinator has compiled a comprehensive notebook binder of special education processes and procedures with the necessary forms and guidance. The forms provide classroom teachers with clear information regarding not only the special education identification and services processes, but also about instructional strategies that might be effective in teaching students with disabilities.

Both the special educators and the ESL teacher agreed that the manner in which they provide support for classroom teachers and the type of support are similar in several ways. Each grade level has a designated day and time to meet with the Learning Enhancement Team. The LET members are available to staff, and often observe and interact with teachers in their classrooms. In addition, they provide classroom teachers with guidance regarding appropriate materials to meet students' needs.

<p>Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Teaching Staff</p>	<p>1E</p> <p>The school’s instructional staff is qualified to implement the school as envisioned in the charter. Teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success.</p> <p>A school that meets this benchmark will be able to demonstrate that teachers are competent in their assigned content area and generally use instructional practices that lead to student academic success. (While handled under the benchmark for legal and charter compliance, it is important to note that a school must also be able to demonstrate that teachers are certified or otherwise qualified under both federal and state law with few exceptions. In instances where the school has not been in compliance with this requirement of law, the school should be able to show that it has taken swift and appropriate remedial measures.)</p>
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Preparedness in planning is endemic among faculty in the school. Not one lesson observed was not carefully prepared and planned. Based on student performance results and observations, teachers at Bronx Prep appeared competent in their content areas, and used effective instructional practices. There was no evidence that teachers lacked the content knowledge they needed to teach the curricula.

The school is very selective in its hiring of instructional staff. Applicants for teaching positions must teach a lesson while being observed, and be critiqued on that lesson. In addition, students have played a role in the process by developing a list of what they consider to be characteristics of a “good” teacher. Ultimately, the school has found that the “average” teacher will not typically apply or be hired as part of the school’s staff.

Over 60 percent of the school’s instructional staff have three or more years of teaching experience, with the maximum being 14 years. At the time of the renewal visit, 69 percent of Bronx Preparatory Charter School’s teachers were certified. The school acknowledges in its application for renewal that it is committed to coming into full compliance with teacher certification requirements contained in the Charter School Law. The school has demonstrated its commitment to achieving this goal by dedicating a portion of its professional development resources to pay for teachers’ coursework required to obtain certifications. Thirty-five percent of the school’s teachers took courses during the summer in order that as many as possible would be certified (or, at least, in the process of applying for certification) by the start of the 2004-05 school year.

<p>Benchmark 1F</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>1F</p> <p>The school has implemented discipline policies and procedures that promote learning for all students.</p> <p>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.</p>
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Staff of the Bronx Preparatory Charter School refer to students as “scholars” or “visionaries.” The distinction between the two is based on whether the student is in middle school (fifth through eighth grades) or high school (ninth and 10th grades). If the school’s charter is renewed, the practice will extend to students in 11th and 12th grades, and they will be referred to as “luminaries.” Although not part of the school’s discipline code or procedures, the use of these names are constant reminders to the students of the school’s academic and behavioral expectations of them as “scholars” in the fifth through eighth grades. In the ninth and 10th grade, the label “visionary” helps students remain aware of their closeness to fulfilling their educational dreams and the intellectual development yet needed to attain those dreams. Finally, students in the 11th and 12th grades will earn the distinction of becoming “luminaries,” which will remind them that they are beacons of light for others to follow as they prepare for college and the world beyond Bronx Prep.

This system of moving from one distinctive group to the next, along with the school’s “7 Cs” and “Scholar Dollars” or “Visionary Reports,” provide the foundation for maintaining a culture requiring minimal behavioral interventions. The “7 Cs” include: curiosity, commitment, competence, character, confidence, caring and community. Scholars can earn “scholar dollars” by exemplifying or practicing the “7 Cs.” Reports of middle school students’ behavior and attendance is sent home each week for parent signature; students earn “Scholar Dollars” based on that report. Parents of students in the ninth and 10th grades, “visionaries,” receive a similar report on a bi-weekly basis, and signatures are also required.

Students in the school exemplified courteous and respectful behavior both toward the teachers and administrators, and toward each other. Students exhibited pride in their school, as well as a sense of ownership. Students were observed providing fellow students with support in the form of applause, cheers and chants for providing correct responses in class. In most classrooms, no sidebar conversations were held or tolerated by the teacher. Some students did manage to quietly engage in off-task behaviors or activities, such as doodling or drawing. However, even in these cases, the students did not typically distract other students from learning. Students also demonstrated their understanding and familiarity with the STEPS expectations which include “Sit up straight, Track the speaker, Enrich the class, Pay attention and Show you understand.” Teachers would remind students, upon occasion, to follow a specific letter of the STEPS, and a visible change in student behavior could be observed in a classroom.

In addition to the positive references to students, the “7 Cs” and STEPS, the Staff Developer’s “plan” also plays an important role in establishing and maintaining

student order and discipline. One teacher explained that the “plan” creates “a disciplined environment,” “gets rid of distractions,” and creates “a tone of focus where everyone is able to be on task.”

The school’s “Handbook for Students and Parents 2004-2005” outlines student behavioral expectations and consequences for regular education and special education students. The handbook also outlines behaviors that would result in detention, in-school or out-of-school suspension, or expulsion. Teachers would rely on the school’s special education coordinator and special education teacher for additional assistance if a student in question were classified as a student with a disability.

<p>Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>1G.1</p> <p>The school’s professional development program aligns with the school’s mission, assists teachers in meeting students’ academic needs and school goals, and addresses any identified shortcomings in student learning and/or teacher content knowledge.</p> <p>Professional development offerings at a school that meets this benchmark are aligned with the school’s educational philosophy and are effective in helping teachers improve instruction. Most importantly, professional development practices at the school are a priority of the school leadership and buttress the instructional program, meet student learning needs and result in increased student achievement. The school’s calendar reflects that professional development and instructional planning are a high priority. A school should also be able to demonstrate that necessary support for inexperienced teachers is available. Teachers and school leaders report professional development activities have resulted in gains in teacher pedagogic content, knowledge, and skills and this expertise has led to increased student academic achievement.</p>
	<p>1G.2</p> <p>The school has a system in place for ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement that supports the school’s ability to reach the goals contained in its Accountability Plan.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has leaders who spend extended time in classrooms. Teachers receive relevant and helpful written and verbal feedback, counsel, support, and opportunities to increase the instructional skills and content knowledge required for the school to meet its academic goals.</p>

The instructional staff of Bronx Preparatory Charter School begins each year by participating in the pre-opening professional development session. For the 2004-05 school year, the session included two full weeks, with the first week focusing entirely on teachers new to the staff and the second week incorporating the school’s veteran teachers. During the pre-school opening session in August, instructional staff were provided information regarding the school and its policies; introduced to administrative staff; and inculcated to the mission, goals and expectations of Bronx Prep for students, staff and parents. However, a majority of the session was devoted to professional development to enhance the pedagogical skills and practices of the teachers.

The school’s roster includes a full-time Staff Developer who currently plays the primary role in ascertaining and addressing the professional development needs of the instructional staff. The Staff Developer has, in fact, developed a book referred to as a “plan” that is used as the basis for ongoing teacher training and development. The “plan” provided guidance to teachers in all aspects of instruction from classroom design and black (white) board set-up to lesson planning, behavior management and assessment. During the renewal visit, the Staff Developer spent a significant amount of time observing teaching and learning, and providing feedback to classroom teachers. It was clear from teacher interviews that the Staff Developer’s feedback was highly valued and provided clear guidance to improving instructional strategies and

skills. As part of the feedback, the Staff Developer would assign the teacher two or three areas to focus on to improve instruction between observations. Teachers confirmed that classroom observations and teacher critiques were a routine part of their school life. However, teachers also indicated that there was a slightly higher frequency of observations and feedback for teachers new to teaching and to the school. Teachers referred to the Staff Developer as “tough,” but they looked forward to his classroom visits and subsequent critiques.

As part of their commitment to ongoing professional development, the school’s administrative cabinet facilitated the institution of the practice of teacher peer observations with opportunities for feedback conversations. This form of professional development required the support of the school’s cabinet to ensure all the necessary scheduling and classroom coverage was provided when such observations and discussions occurred.

In addition to the classroom observations, feedback, and teacher peer observations, the school schedule includes monthly staff meetings, grade level meetings and topic specific meetings. The schedule also includes weekly departmental meetings. The departmental meetings are often used to analyze student work with regard to the school’s curriculum, state standards, and the improvement of instruction. The grade level meetings periodically use the results of the monthly reading and math assessments as a focus for discussion.

Teachers at Bronx Prep are formally evaluated at least twice each school year – typically mid-year and late spring. The basis of their evaluation can be found in the “Professional Evaluation Rubric,” developed by the school’s Principal and instituted during the current school year. The rubric is composed of six domains within the areas of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. At these meetings progress and needs for improvement are discussed. A second late spring meeting is held to either invite teachers to return the following year or to inform them that their contract will not be renewed. Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, teachers will also complete a “Teacher Self-Evaluation” form. Teacher pay raises are also directly linked to performance.

Renewal Question 2

Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?

Benchmark 2A
School Specific Non-Academic Goals

2A

The school meets or has made meaningful and consistent progress towards meeting the Unique Measures of non-academic student outcomes that are contained in its Accountability Plan over the life of the charter.

The Bronx Preparatory Charter School included three non-academic student outcome goals and measures in its Accountability Plan. They are as follows:

Goal VI: Bronx Prep students will demonstrate performance skills.

Measure: In the spring of each academic year, Bronx Prep students will achieve a rating of proficient or better in performances displayed in a school-wide spring concert rated by a panel of experts in the arts.

In its third year, the school acknowledged its dissatisfaction with using the school-wide spring concert as a vehicle to assess student proficiency in artistic performance. The school's administration determined that the spring concert only provided the highlights of each artistic elective and failed to measure individual student performance or growth in skill level. The school, therefore, instituted a jury system of evaluating student performances using its own art staff. In the spring of 2004, students who had been enrolled for three, four and five years were individually judged by a panel of judges. Performances were rated based on presentation, preparation, and technique. The scores were converted to the New York State four-point scale. The following percentages of the school's seventh through ninth graders scored at Level 3 or 4 in the seven artistic areas:

Strings	Piano	Guitar	Percussion	Theater	Visual Arts	Step (Dancing)
90%	90%	100%	70%	93%	80%	92%

Goal VII: Bronx Prep students will develop and demonstrate character skills and civic responsibility.

Measure 1: Scholar Dollar averages – 70 percent of Bronx Prep scholars will have scholar dollar averages of \$42 or better (changed from \$35 during the 2000 to 2003 school years).

Measure 2: In the spring of each academic year, Bronx Prep will be rated a safe school by three to five educators and other professionals invited to drop in with or without notice to evaluate (a) the safety of the school, and (b) the level at which Bronx Prep scholars display the behavior and character measured by the scholar dollar report.

Measure 3: By the end of each academic year, all Bronx Prep students will display civic responsibility by completing a minimum of two community service projects (lead by their Bronx Prep advisor).

The students of Bronx Preparatory Charter School have been consistent in demonstrating their growth in character skills and civic responsibility. During the 2003-04 school year, students eligible for scholar dollars again met the goal of 70 percent having averages of \$42 or better. Student also met the goal in earlier years. The school used a 26-question school climate survey to determine the degree to which the school felt “safe.” Each year the school has had three to five visitors complete the survey. Their responses were recorded on a scale of 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). Each year’s visitors have indicated that they consider the school to be safe, and that the students exhibit good character skills and behavior. The visitor scores have averaged approximately 1.5.

In fulfilling the third measure of character skills and civic responsibility, all students of Bronx Preparatory Charter School have participated in community service projects. In the 2003-04 school year, students actually participated in four community service projects: painted, cleaned, planted, and revitalized Crotona Park; painted four murals for the new school building; ninth graders completed in-school service toward the 100 hours of community service required for graduation; and 20 scholars participated in a Saturday program called “Young Heroes” which focused on leadership development.

Goal X: Bronx Prep students will demonstrate exemplary attendance.

Measure: Each year average daily attendance at Bronx Prep will meet or exceed 90 percent.

The Bronx Preparatory Charter School has successfully met this goal in each year of its charter. The daily attendance rate for each year is as follows: 2000/01 – 97 percent; 2001/02 – 95 percent; 2002/03 – 96 percent; and 2003/04 – 94 percent. Students are inculcated with the understanding that being present is critical to learning what they need to know to be successful in school and life. In addition to daily school attendance, the school also holds required Saturday classes called “field lessons” once per month. Attendance at Saturday field lessons has averaged about 70 percent of the student population.

<p>Benchmark 2B</p> <p>Mission & Design Elements</p>	<p>2B</p> <p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The school that meets this benchmark has school Board members, parents, teachers, school leader(s) and community partners that consistently present evidence of the school’s success with reference to the school’s mission and the key design elements included in its charter application. Key elements of the school’s design are well implemented and the school’s academic results, governance, and instructional practices reflect the mission of the school.</p>
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The mission of the Bronx Preparatory Charter School is to prepare underserved middle and high school students for higher education, civic involvement, and lifelong success through a structured, caring environment of high academic and social expectations. The school seeks to graduate young men and women who think critically and creatively; have attained strong skills in mathematics, language, literature, history, science, technology, and the arts; and who are committed to a lifetime of learning and civic involvement. In addition, the focus of achieving academically is to attend college. The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design features of its charter application.

Throughout the school’s initial charter period, almost 100 percent of its student population each year has been students from the South Bronx who are African American or Hispanic and eligible for free or reduced lunch. Approximately six to seven percent of its student population has historically been students with educational disabilities. The percentage of students who require English language learner (ELL) services has increased since the school’s opening, and at the time of the renewal visit hovered between five and six percent.

Entering fifth grade students are generally performing about two grades below grade level in core academic areas. Although the school’s educational program includes a variety of components, Bronx Prep’s intense daily focus on literacy and math; consistent high expectations for student performance held by teachers, administrators and parents; and extended instructional time have been instrumental in the resultant gains in student performance.

The focus on academic performance in preparation for college is consistently held by teachers, administrators, parents and students. When interviewed, one parent summed up the group’s understanding of the school’s mission: “The kids here may not know what they’re going to be when they grow up, but they know they’re going to college...and not Bronx Community College - to a great university!” The school’s emphasis on college – preparation for it, knowledge about it, normalization of it – is intentional, universal and relentless. Students live with the intent on a daily basis. Classes are named after universities, and university banners line the walls.

<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, 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>

The Bronx Preparatory Charter School has a strong and effective Board of Trustees that is committed to ensuring the continuity and stability of the school’s infrastructure to support the academic achievement of the school’s students. Throughout the initial charter period, the Executive Director, along with the school’s Principal, has provided regular reports to the Board about the school’s progress, both academic and financial. The Board’s Accountability Committee was responsible for reviewing the school’s progress in achieving each measure of each goal in the plan, and providing their analysis to the full Board. The Board held several meetings each year for that purpose, in addition to which the school’s Principal provided updates at almost every Board meeting. The Board and the school administration speak the same language regarding the driving focus of the school being the academic achievement of the students.

The Board of Trustees, at the time of the renewal visit, was comprised of 19 members, including a parent representative. Based on the interview conducted during the visit and the school’s renewal application, the Board is structured in a manner that most effectively allows the Board to utilize the expertise of its members in providing

oversight to the school. The Board uses a committee/subcommittee structure that includes the following standing committees: Compensation, Finance, Building/Asset Management, Academic Accountability, and Grievance. In addition, the Finance Committee includes an Audit Subcommittee. The Board also establishes Ad Hoc committees as needed, such as a Search Committee and a Strategic Planning Committee. Evidence indicated that the Board, as a whole, and the various subcommittees were active and met regularly. Board members also used electronic means to stay in close communication regarding the business of governing the school.

The Board of the school and the Board of its 501(c)(3) affiliate, The Friends of Bronx Prep, are comprised of the same members. This creates a unique situation, ripe with potential for conflicts of interest. The Board is keenly aware of the necessity to ensure that accurate and separate records are kept of each entities operations and financial transactions. To assist in identifying such matters, the Board obtains limited advice from the two attorneys who are Trustees, but primarily uses the legal services of three or four outside firms, as needed. In addition, both organizations are subject to audit by an external auditing firm.

A prime example of the ability of the Board to adhere to its conflict of interest and ethics policies is the fact that the Executive Director of the school also sits on the school's Board of Trustees, and has done so since the inception of the school. The Executive Director recuses herself from any and all discussions that may represent a conflict of interest for the school, such as her salary. This arrangement has actually served the school well, in part because of the integrity of the Executive Director and the members of the Board.

The inclusion of the school's Executive Director on the Board of Trustees has facilitated the continued focus of the Board on the achievement of the mission and goals of Bronx Prep. The Board has used the school's Accountability Plan goals as part of the metric for determining the effectiveness of the school and its leader and to guide it in establishing and implementing policies. The Board has recently reached a milestone in the school's development with the opening of the new facility which houses fifth through 10th grades. The building project will continue, however, through the second phase which will culminate with the completion of the build-out to house grades five through 12 (anticipated completion during Winter 2005/06). Evidence of the Board's savvy and focus on financial stability in this process is the fact that fundraising has already covered almost 75 percent of the total cost. Additional evidence of the Board's focus on directing the majority of all resources to the school's educational program is reflected in the minimal space allocated for administrative offices in the new structure.

<p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Parents & Students</p>	<p>2D</p> <p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school as evidenced by survey results as well as the volume of parents who choose the school to provide education for their children and the degree to which parents persist with that choice over the child’s academic career.</p> <p>The school that satisfies this benchmark will be able to show through generally accepted surveying standards and practices that a large majority of all parents with students enrolled at the school are satisfied with the school. As only a well-informed parent can be meaningfully satisfied, the school must be able to show that it has provided to parents detailed and accurate information about their child’s performance as well as the performance of the school as a whole. The school should also be able to provide data on application lottery, enrollment and persistence rates to demonstrate that large numbers of parents seek entrance to the school, and far more importantly, keep their children enrolled year-to-year. Ideal survey data will also provide an explanation for the persistence rate experienced by the school.</p>
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The Bronx Preparatory Charter School has included in its Accountability Plan goals that focus on parent and student satisfaction. Parent satisfaction is measured through the results of the annual administration of the “School Climate survey,” while student satisfaction is measured both through student attendance and the results of a student satisfaction survey. Also, although not part of the school’s Accountability Plan, student retention can be used as an indicator of parent satisfaction.

For the 2003-04 school year 85 percent of the parents completed and returned the “School Climate Survey.” The results indicated that 90-100 percent of the responding parents agreed that:

- the school provided a strong academic program;
- their child(ren) felt confident of his/her ability to learn;
- the school helped their child(ren) develop into a well-adjusted person; and
- they, as parents, had opportunities or avenues to express their views on school matters.

This information was corroborated by the parents who participated in the parent interview conducted as part of the renewal visit to the school. Parents in the group of eight expressed strong support for the school and its programs. Their expressions reflected their child(ren)’s experiences in Bronx Prep and the impact of those experiences on their lives. The school’s focus on college attendance had so influenced one parent’s child that she commented that although the students at Bronx Prep didn’t know what they would be when they grew up, they knew they are going to college, and not a community college. Another parent stated that when she returned home from work in the evenings, things in her home had changed. Her children were at the dining room table doing their math and singing “Bronx Prep songs.” Still another parent said that in the summer rather than being content to play with Nintendo and PlayStation, the children were “dying” to go back to school.

Although not one of the formal indicators of parent satisfaction, one of the strongest indicators can be garnered from the fact that the school’s advertising/recruiting budget

is small. The parents themselves are the school's best advertising/recruiting source. They hear about the school by word of mouth from co-workers, friends, babysitters, and others.

The school has an annual attrition rate of 6.6 percent which can be conversely viewed in terms of annual student retention rates of between 92-95 percent. The school has reviewed and reflected upon reasons why students and their parents leave the school. They have found that the greatest attrition typically occurs during a student's first year at Bronx Prep. Often the school's longer daily hours and the academic demand of the program combined with increased commutes are just too much of a challenge for both the students and their family. The second most likely time that students may leave the school is at the point of transition from eighth to ninth grade, from middle school to the upper school, when students are evaluated based on academic and character grades, test scores and attendance. In a limited number of situations when students faced the probability of being retained in the eighth grade, they elected to return to the traditional public schools.

The school has clear methods of communicating with parents regarding student progress, school policies and activities, or other topics. Students and parents annually receive copies of the "Bronx Preparatory Charter School: A Handbook for Students and Parents," which provides information regarding the school's academic program, student academic, behavioral and attendance expectations, staff roster, and other areas. Parents of middle school students receive weekly behavioral reports through the "Scholar Dollars" incentive program. Parents of high school students receive "Visionary Reports" regarding student academic and behavioral conduct for students in high school. Parent-teacher conferences are held at the end of the first, second, and third quarters; parents receive quarterly report cards and mid-quarter progress reports. The school has regularly scheduled Parent Advisory Committee meetings, and the Board of Trustees includes a parent representative. In addition, information regarding the school is posted on school bulletin boards and parents are encouraged to visit the school.

<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>A school that meets this benchmark will have compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. In addition, at the time of renewal, the school will be in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws and regulations. Such school will have maintained and have had in place effective systems and controls for ensuring that legal and charter requirements were and are met. A school should also be able to demonstrate that the school has an active and ongoing relationship with independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, and incidents and makes recommendations as needed.</p>
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Based on evidence to date and a review of relevant policies, Board minutes and interviews, the school appears to have been, and presently appears to be, generally in substantial compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations, and the provisions in its charter. We also note that the State Education Department has indicated that as of January 28, 2005, the school was only in partial compliance with the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE) in that the school safety plan submitted pursuant to Education Law section 2801-a was not complete.

With few exceptions, the Board continues to operate under appropriate policies, systems and processes that ensure programmatic and fiscal stability. While the school's by-laws state that school trustees can participate in board meetings by conference call in contravention of the Open Meetings Law, there was no evidence that Board members had done so. (The Open Meetings Law only permits Trustees to vote and be counted toward quorum if they are present by videoconference link in a place where the public has notice and access.) The school's policies did not reflect the full range of public notification of Board meetings required by the Open Meetings Law, including media and public notice at least 72 hours prior to any meetings.

Based on a review of its by-laws and information obtained during the interview of the Board conducted during the renewal visit, the Board has adhered to its policies and by-laws.

To assist in identifying matters that require outside legal counsel, the Board obtains limited advice from two of its members who are attorneys. However, the Board primarily uses the legal services of three or four outside firms, as needed.

Renewal Question 3

Is the School Fiscally Sound?

Benchmark 3A
Board Oversight

3A

The Board has provided effective financial oversight, including having made financial decisions that furthered the school's mission, program and goals.

School administrators provide the finance committee with fiscal reports on a quarterly basis. Oral feedback is received from both the committee and the full Board related to these reports. Staffing, compensation, and facilities are examples of issues discussed. Administrators describe the Board's oversight as strategic and policy oriented. Board minutes support this description.

As typical of nearly all charter schools, obtaining a suitable facility was the first goal of the Board. As part of this goal, the Board made a concerted effort to avoid saddling the school with significant debt. The efforts of the Board, school leaders and the supporting organization, Friends of Bronx Preparatory Charter School, have thus far achieved a level of success in raising funds for the school that is likely unprecedented in the history of charter schools. More than \$14 million has been raised so far toward the estimated total of \$19 million for the facility. As detailed in the school's renewal application, a significant milestone was reached in August of 2004 with the opening of Phase I of its new facility. The school's new facility is state-of-the-art with large classrooms and specialty rooms, while administrative space in the building is notably modest. For the facility opening, spending on instructional supplies and materials were augmented by a grant received from the New York City Department of Education.

The finance committee, formed in March 2003, meets quarterly and presents recommendations to the Board when appropriate. The Board initiates the budget process early in the spring allowing for sufficient consideration, discussion and modifications before formal adoption. An audit committee, that now operates as a subcommittee of the finance committee has been functioning since the school's inception. Evidence in the Board minutes indicates that the audit subcommittee reports to the full Board on the results of the annual financial statement audit and discusses the impact and import of management letter comments.

A review of a sample of Board minutes noted evidence that the Board was actively involved with oversight of school finances. At the meeting with Board members during the renewal visit, members demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Board is composed of a diverse group of professionals and its members appeared well informed, engaged and committed to the mission of the school.

The Board recently adopted the document Fiscal Practices and Financial Controls which summarizes the fiscal policies and controls that are currently in effect at the school. Copies of the policies were distributed to the key members of the school's cabinet and the Director of Finance and Operations. The school also has a written policy manual for faculty and staff. The manual includes sections on educational and administrative practices, including faculty achievement agreement and staff

performance evaluations and discipline policy, non-discrimination policies, employment policies, workplace procedures, resignation/termination, grievances, and benefits. The manual defines reimbursements that must be approved by the Executive Director.

<p>Benchmark 3B Budgeting and Long Range Planning</p>	<p>3B 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>
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The school’s Board and administrators engaged in a strategic planning process resulting in a ten-year plan. The first five years of the plan were included in its application for renewal. The overall fiscal plan includes detailed financial assumptions and is program driven.

A good example of the school’s long-range planning focus relates to its one request for a change in its program. In August 2002, the school requested to increase the enrollment size of its fifth grade from 50 to 100 students for the last year of its initial charter (2004-2005). The timeliness of the request is notable in that it was more than two years before it would take effect.

The annual budget process starts in the spring each year. Staff presents the budget to the finance committee which reviews it and submits it to the full Board for consideration. Key employees involved in the budget process are the Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Director of Finance and Operations. Each is directly involved in estimating future expenses and working with the Board to modify the budget as needed. The Principal and Assistant Principal are also involved with regard to staffing and other issues.

Actual revenues have exceeded budgeted revenues in each year, and the school’s actual revenues have also exceeded actual expenses in each year. Board minutes provide evidence the budget is evaluated over the course of the year and that modifications are made when necessary. Administrators indicate that when over budget situations are first identified on a line-item level, the Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Director of Finance and Operations search for savings in the budget so that it can present a recommendation to the Board to modify the budget with no net increase in cost. Occasionally, emergency situations have developed where the Executive Director had to ask the Board for additional funds. In the instance cited, the school was able to raise funds through private philanthropy to cover the additional costs that were related to security.

<p>Benchmark 3C</p> <p>Internal Controls</p>	<p>3C</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>
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Since the school’s inception, the Executive Director has had ultimate responsibility for all fiscal matters of the school. The school started with a small enrollment and grew slowly over the term of its charter. The small size of the school did not necessitate establishing sophisticated systems and could not support unnecessary overhead. Looking ahead, the school continues to anticipate having a lean administrative team. As a result, the school will continue to need to establish and maintain compensating controls where needed, such as instances where duties cannot be fully segregated due to the limited number of staff. The school added a Director of Finance and Operations in June 2003, which has bolstered its operations. This Director is well qualified with a good background in not-for-profit accounting.

Based on interviews with staff and review of documentation, the school has established processes and controls related to payroll, procurement and safeguarding of assets. The school makes use of group purchase discounts and state Office of General Services contracts, when possible, to realize cost savings and ensure the prudent use of resources. Additional systems and controls will need to be further developed as the school matures. For example, the school is beginning to implement a purchase order system that will improve accountability over procurement. Also, although the school has a system to record fixed assets, it has not yet established procedures for performing periodic physical inventories.

Management letter comments issued by the school’s independent certified public accountant were addressed in a timely fashion. The school’s annual audit reports on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and grants did not disclose any reportable conditions, material weaknesses, or instances of non-compliance. The lack of deficiencies in these independent reports provides some, but certainly not absolute, assurance that the school has maintained adequate internal controls and procedures. The purposes of the reports are not to provide assurance on internal control over financial reporting or an opinion on compliance. The finance committee reviews the financial statement audit report and management letter and presents them to the full Board for approval.

A State Education Department fiscal review conducted in the spring of 2003 noted that certain written fiscal procedures had not yet been developed. The school has recently developed a written summary of its fiscal practices and financial controls. Areas covered include budget oversight at the Board of Trustees’ level, annual financial audit and tax return, and daily procedures to ensure fiscal responsibility.

<p>Benchmark 3D</p> <p>Financial Reporting</p>	<p>3D</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>
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Generally, the school has met its financial reporting requirements. The annual financial statements, budget, and quarterly financial reports were generally filed on time with a few exceptions. Each financial statement audit report received an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion on the financial statements indicates that, in the auditor's opinion, the school's financial statements and notes fairly represent, in all material respects, the financial position, changes in net assets and its cash flows in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

The school's financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2003 were presented in consolidated format with its supporting organization, Friends of Bronx Preparatory Charter School Foundation, as required by generally accepted accounting principles. The statements included consolidating statements of financial position and activities as supplemental information. These consolidating statements show a breakdown of school and foundation numbers separately.

<p>Benchmark 3E</p> <p>Financial Condition</p>	<p>3E</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>
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The school completed the 2002-03 year in strong financial condition. The school had a positive change in net assets of \$792,575 and finished with total net assets of \$1,561,771. Unrestricted net assets totaled \$1,183,689 or \$5,918 per approved enrollment. The school has maintained positive fund balances and adequate cash flow. The school's expenses per student have declined over the life of its charter, while per pupil revenues have increased. Although it relied significantly on fundraising during its first four years, the school has become less reliant on private fundraising on per pupil basis.

The school budgets its enrichment program expenses (extended day art and music) separate from its regular day expenses and raises funds specifically to operate that program. Enrichment program expenses were 11 percent of total expenses for the year ended June 30, 2004 (unaudited).

The school and its affiliate, Friends of Bronx Preparatory Charter School Foundation (Friends), have successfully raised a prodigious amount of funds for school operations. Friends has raised \$14.1 million in the past three years and has secured a \$4 million loan to facilitate the financing of the school's new facility. Private grants and donations in the first three years were between 44 and 49 percent as a percent of total expenses.

The school has no long-term debt, but is committed under non-cancelable leasing arrangements for office and instructional space at a cost of \$84,414 for the fiscal year and 2005. The school has subleased the space to another charter school.

Renewal Question 4

Should the School's Charter Be Renewed, What Are Its Plans for the Term of a Future Charter?

<p>Benchmark 4A</p> <p>Curricular & Assessment Plans</p>	<p>4A</p> <p>The school's curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a future charter are reasonable, feasible, and achievable and are likely to improve student learning and achievement.</p> <p>Schools that plan to retain or augment curricular and assessment designs presented in the original charter application have provided evidence that the implementation of that design has resulted in academic success during the term of the existing charter.</p> <p>Schools that propose a material redesign to the curriculum and assessment plans for the term of a new charter have clearly articulated the new design, provided research and evidence that the proposed new design will result in the increased academic performance of children, and a plan and timeline outlining the implementation of the new curricular design. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Schools that seek to add grade levels not included in the approval of the original charter have presented an outline of the curriculum and specific assessment plans for the term of a future charter. These plans are likely to improve student learning and achievement and are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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Over the term of a second charter, the Bronx Preparatory Charter School would continue to grow, adding 11th and 12th grades, to reach its ultimate goal of becoming a middle and high school. In doing so, it would double its current size to enroll 700 students. The school would continue to hold college as the goal for its students. In addition, the school would continue its strong academic and behavioral traditions established for its middle school scholars, and further develop and refine the upper school academic practices for its visionaries and luminaries. Just as the school is aware that entering middle school students require significant structure to gain the necessary skills to improve their academic and social performance, the school is also keenly sensitive to the fact that upper school students must learn to handle more academic and personal freedom in a responsible manner as they prepare to graduate.

Bronx Preparatory Charter School was originally chartered to include fifth through 10th grades. The school's Executive Director, at that time the applicant, submitted a curriculum to guide instruction in fifth through 12th grades that was aligned with New York State standards. That curriculum was approved by both the University Trustees and by the Board of Regents. Therefore, although the school did not offer grades 11 and 12 during its initial charter period, the school is prepared to move forward using that curriculum as the frame for its academic program. At the time of the renewal visit, the school's Principal and staff developer provided leadership to the cabinet and instructional staff in flushing out the details of the content areas in anticipation of adding 11th and 12th grades.

To earn a Regents high school diploma from the Bronx Preparatory Charter School, students will meet the credit requirements established by the New York State Education Department Board of Regents, and pass the required Regents examinations in mathematics, science, English, Global History and U.S. History and Government. In addition to those requirements, Bronx Prep 12th grade students will also successfully complete a senior thesis or project and 100 hours of community service. The senior thesis or project will replace the “culminating projects” required of 12th grade students under the school’s initial charter. The school will expect all 12th grade students to prepare humanities and artistic portfolios which they will present to a committee of internal and external reviewers for a final evaluation or assessment. Finally, the 12th grade students will be expected to take the PSAT, the SAT/ACT, apply to five or more colleges, military services and/or professional career institutions (one in-state and one out-of-state), and be accepted into, at least, one.

Bronx Prep acknowledges that in order for students to earn a Regents diploma with distinction the student must pass, in addition to the requirements for a Regents diploma, the Regents Mathematics B examination, a second Regents examination in science, and the Regents comprehensive assessment in a foreign language. The school, consistent with its high expectations of all students, anticipates that many of its graduates will earn the Regents diploma with distinction. In addition, the school has created an even more rigorous standard for students to achieve the Bronx Prep diploma with distinction. This diploma would require students to meet the school’s graduation requirements, complete the requirements for the Regents diploma with distinction, maintain an 85 average or above, and pass the SAT II in two subjects. The school believes that any student who successfully earns the Bronx Prep diploma with distinction will be prepared to attend any top college.

Subject to the Institute’s final recommendation and the University Trustees’ approval, the school’s curriculum and assessment plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

<p>Benchmark 4B</p> <p>Accountability Plan</p>	<p>4B</p> <p>The school has provided a draft Accountability Plan that defines the school’s measurable goals for the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The school’s proposed Accountability Plan follows the guidelines set forth by the Institute and presents an accountability system that is reasonable, feasible, and achievable.</p>
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The school has submitted a draft Accountability Plan that is largely in line with the demands of the Institute’s Accountability Plan guidelines. The Institute will, based upon the final renewal recommendation and vote of the State University Trustees, work with Bronx Preparatory Charter School to finalize the school’s Accountability Plan goals and measures and will codify it in any final renewal charter document.

The Accountability Plan as submitted in the renewal application is generally reasonable and feasible; however certain additional measures may be required in order to take account of changes in the New York State’s testing regimen or revisions to the Institute’s Accountability Plan Guidelines. In such cases, these additional measures will be added either prior to the execution of a new proposed renewal charter or thereafter.

<p>Benchmark 4C</p> <p>School Calendar & Enrollment</p>	<p>4C</p> <p>The school has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction. Additionally, the school has provided an enrollment plan outlining the grades and growth patterns it anticipates during the term of a future charter.</p> <p>The plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p>
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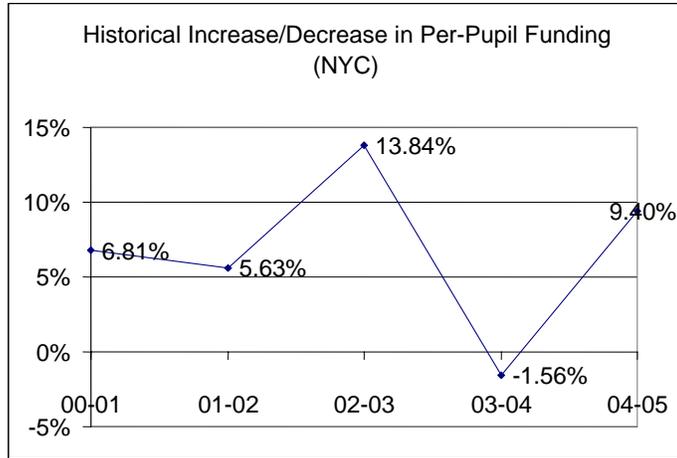
Bronx Preparatory Charter School has provided a sample school calendar that includes the number of days and proposed daily hours of instruction for fifth through 10th grades. Prior to the completion of the renewal process, the school will be required to submit daily hours of instruction for grades 11 and 12. The school has also provided an enrollment plan that outlines the student enrollment growth over the term of the charter, if renewed. The school would grow from being a fifth through 10th grade school of 350 students to a fifth through 12th grade school of 700 students in the 2009-2010 school year.

Subject to the Institute’s final recommendation and the University Trustees’ approval, the plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.

<p>Benchmark 4D</p> <p>Fiscal & Facility Plans</p>	<p>4D</p> <p>The school has provided a reasonable and appropriate five-year fiscal plan for the term of a future charter.</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>
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Long-range fiscal projections are more susceptible to error than those for a single year. Such projections are subject to revision due to changes in local conditions, objectives, and laws. The school’s application explicitly states that should a pattern develop of public revenue growth above or below the projected growth rate for per pupil revenues, that it will adjust expense categories accordingly. For public revenue growth in excess of that planned, the Executive Director indicated this would most likely be an opportunity that the school would take to scale back reliance on fundraising rather than to look toward program enhancements. Regardless of the assumptions embedded in the fiscal projections, the school will be required to develop and adopt annual budgets based on known per pupil amounts.

The school concluded that a projected four percent annual increase in per pupil revenue was considered reasonable. While there is degree of uncertainty related to these projected increases, they are less than the historical average increase over the life of the school’s charter (6.9 percent). In addition, the school has established a track record of meeting its financial obligations including a period during which its per pupil revenue had declined from the previous year (2003-2004).



Source: State Education Department

In its renewal application the school incorporates into its fiscal plan the establishment of an operating reserve. This reserve is projected to grow to \$700,000 during the proposed next charter period, with an ultimate goal of \$1 million. In addition, the school has prudently included a capital maintenance reserve to provide for the maintenance needs of the new facility not provided for in maintenance contracts or other line items of the operating budget. All operational details regarding these funds have not yet been worked out. However, the purpose of the operating reserve is to allow the school to weather the anticipated periodic dips in per pupil funding amounts.

The school's current enrollment is 370 which is within the enrollment collar provided in its charter (approved enrollment is 350 students). By enrolling more students than approved, the school has a cushion against student attrition. The school projects that paid (full time equivalent) enrollment will equal the proposed enrollment in its fiscal plan. If the school is able to enroll enough students at the start of the year to allow for attrition, this approach is reasonable. The combination of the school's academic success to date as well as its new facility will undoubtedly be attractive recruiting tools. The school has a waiting list and has not previously needed to spend excessive resources on student recruiting.

When Phase II of the construction is complete, the school will have sufficient space for a projected enrollment of 800 students. Facility costs to be absorbed by the school are projected to be approximately \$408,000 per year to lease the land and service the construction loan. These expenses represent \$905 per student or seven percent of operating expenses in 2005-06 and \$509 or five percent of operating expenses in 2009-10.

Subject to the Institute's final recommendation and the University Trustees' approval, the school's fiscal plans are reasonable, feasible and achievable.