



Bronx Charter School for Better Learning

School Evaluation Report 2011-2012

Visit Date: January 24-26, 2012

Report Issued: June 12, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report includes four components. The first section, titled School Overview, provides descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. The second section provides background information on the conduct of the evaluation visit, including the date of the visit and information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school's current charter cycle. The third section provides the school's 2010-11 Performance Review and Summaries, which gives an analysis of the attainment of the key academic goals in the school's Accountability Plan. Finally, a fourth section entitled School Evaluation Visit presents overall benchmark conclusions (in italics) based on the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks (a component of the Renewal Benchmarks) and an analysis of evidence collected for each of the respective benchmarks. Following these sections, the report includes an appendix containing the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks used during the visit.

The Qualitative Educational Benchmarks address the academic success of the school, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization, including board oversight and organizational capacity. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular and ongoing basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

The report below provides more detailed conclusions, and evidence to support these conclusions, for some benchmarks in order to highlight areas of concern and provide additional feedback. In contrast to the format of reports issued in previous years and in an effort to issue reports in a timelier manner, the Institute now approaches the presentation as an exception report and deliberately emphasizes areas of concern. As such, limited detail and evidence about positive aspects of the program are not an indication that the Institute does not fully recognize evidence of program effectiveness.

Because of the inherent complexity of a school organization, this School Evaluation Report does not contain a single rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. However, it does summarize the various strengths of the school and note areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks.

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	February 23, 2003
Date Initial Charter Approved by: Board of Regents	March 25, 2003
School Opening Date	September, 2003

Location

School Year(s)	Location(s)	Grades	District
2003-04	971 East 227 th Street, Bronx, NY	All	NYC CSD 11
2004-05 to Present	3740 Baychester Avenue, Bronx, NY	All	NYC CSD 11

Renewal

Type of Renewal	Date approved by SUNY Trustees
Initial Full-Term Renewal	January 15, 2008

Current Mission Statement

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning provides its students with a solid foundation for academic success, through achievement that exceeds citywide averages and meets or exceeds New York State standards and national norms in all curriculum areas tested, especially in mathematics and language arts. Our teaching constantly adjusts to the needs of our students, leading to independence, autonomy, responsibility and a sustained love of learning, all of which contribute directly to academic achievement.

The school's educational focus is an approach called *The Subordination of Teaching to Learning*, created by Dr. Caleb Gattegno (1911-1988), an Egyptian-both mathematician who developed materials and techniques for teaching languages, literacy, math and other subjects. Dr. Gattegno's basic principle is that is teachers encourage children's innate curiosity through multi-sensory learning activities, the teachers can step out of the way and students will learn far more than they would in traditional classrooms.

Current Key Design Elements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational focus on <i>The Subordination of Teaching to Learning</i>; • A scientifically-based, proven approach to instruction with heavy reliance on "Words in Color" for literacy instruction and Gattegno mathematics; • Serving at-risk students with the attitude that all children possess the powers of learning described by the Gattegno approach; • Creating a unique learning environment, including passing deliberate Gattegno-focused instructional skills from veteran teachers to novice faculty members; • The tools to make it work: extensive opportunities for intensive staff development; and • Measurable student achievement results through performance-based accountability, including an evaluation of student performance that is woven into the fabric of every lesson.
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School Characteristics

School Year	Original Chartered Enrollment	Revised Charter Enrollment	Actual Enrollment ¹	Original Chartered Grades	Actual Grades	Days of Instruction
2003-04	50	50	50	1	1	181
2004-05	100	100	101	1-2	1-2	180
2005-06	150	162	162	1-3	1-3	182
2006-07	250	216	229	K-4	1-4	186
2007-08	250	270	285	K-4	1-5	185
2008-09	342	N/A	345	K-5	K-5	182
2009-10	342	N/A	355	K-5	K-5	184
2010-11	342	N/A	371	K-5	K-5	184
2011-12	342	N/A	386	K-5	K-5	184

Student Demographics²

	2007-08		2008-09		2009-10	
	Number of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 11 Enrollment	Number of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 11 Enrollment	Number of School Enrollment	Percent of NYC CSD 11 Enrollment
Race/Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black or African American	270	95	323	94	332	94
Hispanic	11	4	19	6	18	5
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	3	1	2	1	3	1
White	0	0	0	0	0	0
Multiracial	0	0	1	0	1	0
Special Populations						
Limited English Proficient	3	1	3	1	3	1
Free/ Reduced Lunch						
Eligible for Free Lunch	140	49	167	48	190	54
Eligible for Reduced -Price Lunch	73	26	67	19	66	19

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

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

Current Board of Trustees³

Board Member Name	Position/Committees
Kimberly Kelly	Chair
Marvin Waldman	Vice-Chair
William Bernhardt	Secretary
Marilyn Maye	Treasurer
Jefferyson Barnes	Trustee
Everett Wallace	Trustee
Roberta Bata	Trustee
Royce Hauw	Trustee
Andrew Waldman	Trustee
Sheryl Jackson	Parent Representative

School Leader(s)

	School Leader(s)
2003-04 to 2004-05	Shubert Jacobs
2005-06 to 2007-08	Dr. Ted Swartz
2008-09 to October 2009	Richard Burke
November 2009 to May 2010	Dr. Ted Swartz, Interim
June 2010 to Present	Dr. Kevin Brennan

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Evaluator (Institute/External)	Date
2003-04	First-Year Visit	Institute	May 6, 2004
2004-05	Second-Year Visit	Institute	May 26, 2005
2005-06	Third-Year Visit	External	April 4-6, 2006
2007-08	Initial Renewal Visit	Institute	Sept. 18-20, 2007
2009-10	Subsequent Visit	Institute	May 11-12, 2010
2011-12	Subsequent Visit	Institute	January 24-26, 2012

³ Source: Institute Board Records.

CONDUCT OF VISIT

Specifications

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
January 24-26, 2012	Ron Miller, Ph.D	Vice President for Accountability
	Danielle Keen	Analyst for School Evaluation
	Jeff Wasbes	Performance and Systems Analyst
	Lori Clement	Senior Analyst
	Aretha Miller	External Consultant

Context of the Visit

Charter Cycle ⁴	
Charter Period	4 th Year of Second Charter Term
Accountability Period	5th Year of Five Year Accountability Period
Impending Renewal Visit	Fall 2012

⁴ Because the Institute makes a renewal decision in the last year of a Charter Period, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of the Charter Period. For initial renewals, the Accountability Period is the first four years of the Charter Period. For subsequent renewals, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous Charter Period through the next to last year of the current Charter Period.

2011 School Performance Review

Performance Summary

In 2010-11, the fourth year of Bronx Charter School for Better Learning's five-year Accountability Period, the school is again meeting its mathematics goal but is not meeting its English language arts goal. While the school met all five measures in its mathematics goal and made some progress in meeting the English language arts goal, the English language arts results are still below those of 2008-09, when the school last met the goal. The school met its science and NCLB goals.

English Language Arts

Based on results of the five measures in its Accountability Plan, Bronx Better Learning is not meeting its English Language Arts goal. While results have improved in each of the measures, the school only met two of the measures. The school again met the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) set by the state and slightly outperformed the local district. Its absolute performance among students in at least their second year increased from 2009-10, but was still below 2008-09 and remained below the target of 75 percent proficient.⁵ Bronx Better Learning continues to perform much lower than predicted in comparison to demographically similar schools and is far from the target of a 0.3 Effect Size. The school again did not meet its cohort growth target, though year-to-year growth did not decline as it had in 2009-10. Specifically, the 5th grade cohort progressed somewhat, while 4th grade cohort showed an equal decline.

Mathematics

Based on results of the five measures in its Accountability Plan, Bronx Better Learning is meeting its mathematics goal in the most recent year after having also met it in the previous year. The school has met its absolute target of 75 percent proficiency in all four years of the Accountability Period, with 98 percent of students scoring proficient in the most recent year, far exceeding the 75 percent target.⁶ The school has consistently exceeded the state's AMO and outperformed its local community school district with more than a ten percentage point difference in the most recent two years. Compared to demographically similar schools statewide, the school met its target for the

⁵ For evaluating the goals' absolute measure, the Institute has again adapted SED's "time-adjusted" ELA cut score for 2010-11 as it had in 2009-10. The other four measures utilize the current, revised ELA cut scores. As such, the cut scores for the Annual Measurable Objective and cohort growth are different from last year when the Institute used "time-adjusted cut score" instead.

⁶ For evaluating the goals' absolute measure, the Institute has again adapted SED's "time-adjusted" math cut score for 2010-11 as it had in 2009-10. The other four measures utilize the current, revised math cut scores. As such, the cut scores for the Annual Measurable Objective and cohort growth are different from last year when the Institute used "time-adjusted cut score" instead.

first time in the 2010-11 Accountability Period. In regards to growth, the two grade cohorts met their respective growth targets and the school met its goal.

Science

Bronx Better Learning is meeting its science goal. The school continues to exceed the absolute target of 75 percent proficient and is likely to outperform the local school district. In 2010-11, 93 percent of 4th graders scored proficient, an increase from the previous year. District results are not yet available for 2010-11. As 83 percent of 4th grade students in the local district were proficient in 2009-10, the school is likely to outperform the district in 2010-11.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: English Language Arts

Bronx Charter School For Better Learning



	2008-09 Grades Served: K-5			2009-10 Grades Served: K-5			2010-11 Grades Served: K-5				
	MET			MET			MET				
	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)	Grades	All Students % (N)	2+ Years Students % (N)		
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above a Level 3 on the New York State exam.(§)	3	78.0 (59)	78.6 (56)	3	46.7 (60)	45.5 (55)	3	69.8 (63)	73.9 (56)		
	4	72.7 (55)	75.0 (52)	4	67.8 (59)	67.2 (58)	4	77.6 (58)	77.2 (52)		
	5	78.9 (52)	78.8 (52)	5	67.4 (49)	67.4 (49)	5	74.1 (54)	73.1 (51)		
	6	(0)	(0)	6	(0)	(0)	6	(0)	(0)		
	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)		
	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)		
	All	76.5 (166)	77.5 (160)	All	60.1 (168)	59.9 (162)	All	73.7 (175)	73.9 (165)		
		Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	
		3-5	175	144	3-5	160	155	3-5	135	122	
	COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district.	Comparison: Bronx District 11			Comparison: Bronx District 11			Comparison: Bronx District 11			
Grades		School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District		
3-5		77.5	68.2	3-5	34.6	38.7	3-5	43.6	42.9		
% FL Actual Predicted Size			% FL Actual Predicted Size			% FL Actual Predicted Size					
48.4		76.5	76.1	0.03	53.7	35.1	49.4	42.9	48.5	-0.36	
Effect Size			Effect Size			Effect Size					
Gr		N	Base Target Result	Gr	N	Base Target Result	Gr	N	Base Target Result		
4		53	67.9 71.5 73.6 *	4	57	78.9 79.0 66.7	4	58	44.8 59.9 34.5		
5		52	69.2 72.1 78.8 *	5	49	77.6 77.7 67.3	5	52	28.8 51.9 38.5		
6			6			6					
7			7			7					
8			8			8					
All	108	66.7	76.9	All	106	78.3	67.0	All	110	37.3	36.4
GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 75 percent performing at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam. An asterisk indicates cohort met target.(§)	YES			YES			NO				
	Gr N Base Target Result			Gr N Base Target Result			Gr N Base Target Result				
	4 53 67.9 71.5 73.6 *			4 57 78.9 79.0 66.7			4 58 44.8 59.9 34.5				
	5 52 69.2 72.1 78.8 *			5 49 77.6 77.7 67.3			5 52 28.8 51.9 38.5				
	6			6			6				
	7			7			7				
	8			8			8				
	All 108 66.7 76.9			All 106 78.3 67.0			All 110 37.3 36.4				

(§) SED's "time adjusted cut scores" are used in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 results for #1 and in the 2009-10 results for #2 and #5. SED's publicly reported cut scores are used for the other results. Data Sources: New York State data; school-submitted workbooks; and the Institute's student performance database.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: Mathematics

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning



	2008-09 Grades Served: K-5			2009-10 Grades Served: K-5			2010-11 Grades Served: K-5			MET			
	All Students		2+ Years	All Students		2+ Years	All Students		2+ Years				
	Grades	% (N)	Students % (N)	Grades	% (N)	Students % (N)	Grades	% (N)	Students % (N)				
ABSOLUTE MEASURES 1. Each year 75 percent of students who are enrolled in at least their second year will perform at or above a Level 3 on the New York State exam. (§) 2. Each year the school's aggregate Performance Index on the State exam will meet the Annual Measurable Objective set forth in the State's NCLB accountability system. (§)	3	96.6 (59)	96.4 (56)	3	100.0 (60)	100.0 (55)	3	100.0 (63)	100.0 (56)	MET			
	4	87.1 (54)	88.2 (51)	4	84.7 (59)	86.2 (58)	4	98.3 (58)	98.2 (57)				
	5	73.0 (52)	73.1 (52)	5	93.9 (49)	93.9 (49)	5	94.4 (54)	94.2 (52)				
	6	(0)	(0)	6	(0)	(0)	6	(0)	(0)				
	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)	7	(0)	(0)				
	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)	8	(0)	(0)				
	All	86.1 (165)	86.2 (159)	All	92.9 (168)	93.2 (162)	All	97.7 (175)	97.6 (165)				
		Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI	AMO	Grades	PI		AMO		
COMPARATIVE MEASURES 3. Each year the percent of students enrolled in at least their second year and performing at or above Level 3 will be greater than that of students in the same grades in the local district. 4. Each year the school will exceed its predicted level of students at or above Level 3 on the State exam by at least a small Effect Size (at least 0.3) based on its Free Lunch (FL) rate.	3-5	184	119	3-5	192	135	3-5	173	137	YES			
	Comparison: Bronx District 11			Comparison: Bronx District 11			Comparison: Bronx District 11						
	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District	Grades	School	District				
	3-5	86.2	85.8	3-5	63.0	51.6	3-5	73.9	53.0				
	% FL	Actual	Predicted	% FL	Actual	Predicted	% FL	Actual	Predicted				
	48.4	86.1	88.5	53.7	61.8	57.5	59.2	73.7	57.7				
			-0.19			0.26			0.92				
			Effect Size			Effect Size			Effect Size				
GROWTH MEASURE 5. Each grade level cohort will reduce by one half the difference between the previous year's baseline and 75 percent performing at or above Level 3 on the New York State exam. An asterisk indicates cohort met target. (§)	Gr N	Base	Target	Result	Gr N	Base	Target	Result	Gr N	Base	Target	Result	
	3	3	33.3	100.0	3	3	98.3	98.4	3	3	58	63.8	69.4
	4	52	88.5	88.6	86.5	4	57	98.3	98.4	4	58	63.8	69.4
	5	52	90.4	90.5	73.1	5	49	91.8	91.9	5	52	53.8	64.4
	6					6				6			
	7					7				7			
	8					8				8			
	All	107	87.9	80.4		All	106	95.3	89.6	All	110	59.1	67.0

(§) SED's "time adjusted cut scores" are used in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 results for #1 and in the 2009-10 results for #2 and #5. SED's publicly reported cut scores are used for the other results. Data Sources: New York State data; school-submitted workbooks; and the Institute's student performance database.

SCHOOL EVALUATION VISIT

Benchmark Conclusions and Evidence

1. B Use of Assessment

Bronx Charter School for Better Learning (“Bronx Better Learning”) now has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data which it uses it to inform instruction. It is not yet clear if this system is effective.

This year, the school, at the behest of its new executive director, has begun to administer a variety of standardized and other assessments that align to the school’s curriculum framework and state performance standards. The school now has a structured assessment calendar and regularly administers the Fountas and Pinnell assessment, interval assessments developed by Achievement Network (ANet) and New York State practice tests. In addition, teachers create unit tests and quizzes using the Performance Plus system with oversight from in-house professional developers.

Teachers systematically collect and analyze standardized assessment results in grade teams with the assistance of in-house professional developers and external ANet developers. Third to 5th grade teachers follow a set protocol for analyzing interval assessment data, which includes creating “data action plans” to address two performance indicators on which students performed poorly, determining how the standards were previously taught, delineating plans for re-teaching and setting protocols for reassessment. Teachers use Fountas and Pinnell data in order to identify students for interventions and to group students for small group work. In addition, teachers report using all assessment results, including those from informal classroom assessments to frequently adjust curriculum pacing.

The school’s leader uses data to evaluate the overall academic program. For example, based on low interval assessment scores, he recently paired the head math teacher, who functions much like a coach, to a new teacher whom he believed needed extra support. Further, he recently made the decision to change the interval assessment schedule, swapping one of the ANet assessments with a mock New York State test in order to build student stamina and attempt to predict student progress in English language arts toward meeting its Accountability Plan goal.

Teachers use writing rubrics, developed in line with state standards in all grades; nevertheless, the school does not yet have a valid and reliable system for assessing student writing based on the rubrics. The school has recently begun using a standardized rubric in grades K-2, provided by external consultants. Grades 3-5 use a standard rubric, developed by the school’s professional developers, for formal writing exercises. Kindergarten-2nd grade teachers have received some professional development in order to norm the grading of writing, although 3rd to 5th grade teachers have not yet received any such training.

Given the recent the implementation of Achievement Network’s interval assessment system, Bronx Better Learning has not yet been able to determine the assessments’ effectiveness. Absent state test results, the school cannot correlate student mastery of performance standards on ANet with those on the state assessments.

1. C Curriculum

Bronx Better Learning has a clearly defined and organized curriculum.

Also this year, the school has implemented the Performance PLUS system, an easily accessible web-based environment, that improves consistency and efficiency in lesson planning by integrating all components of the curriculum in a single platform. Teachers and in-house professional development staff collaborate on lesson planning, using this system at least weekly. They all report that Performance PLUS is user friendly insofar as it organizes and makes searchable state and common core standards, units, lessons and assessments on the school's shared drive. Professional developers and teachers meet every other week by grade level to discuss revisions to curriculum pacing. The school's professional developers are responsible for entering changes while ensuring alignment across grade levels. Professional developers work with external consultants and teachers to use assessment results for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum. Bronx Better Learning holds school-wide meetings twice per year when professional developers and teachers discuss large-scale changes to the curriculum, including the addition and deletion of curriculum subunits. Teachers also meet regularly by content area and grade level in order to develop and refine the curriculum.

Teachers post one expanded lesson plan per week to Performance PLUS that the professional development staff reviews and critiques. Teachers enter a statement reflecting on the lesson after it is delivered and also engage in a dialogue with the professional developers about the lesson after implementation. Professional developers post internally developed resources and model lesson plans on Performance PLUS that teachers incorporate into lessons. The professional development staff members also observe classrooms to ensure alignment between the plans and implemented lessons.

1. D Pedagogy

Quality instruction in mathematics is evident; English language arts instruction is less effective. The school's pedagogical approach lacks the structure necessary to ensure that all students are mastering ELA learning outcomes and small group instructional activity in ELA often lacks focus.

Bronx Better Learning is highly committed to implementing the Gattengo pedagogical approach ("subordination of teaching to learning"), which is more successful in mathematics than English language arts. The Gattengo method focuses on teachers leading their students to awareness about a given topic, rather than directly presenting them with information. Most classes involve very little whole-group instruction; most learning activities take place in small groups or through independent practice. Through this approach, math teachers are able to lead students to a set of understandings, using manipulatives combined with Socratic questioning techniques, in which rigorous classroom activities require students to use higher-order thinking skills, which ultimately contribute to strong student achievement.

However, in English language arts, where the New York State standards focus less on a discrete set of skills, lessons often lack the explicit purposefulness necessary to ensure that students are mastering the standards. Teachers frequently base lessons on broad topics, rather than measurable

learning objectives. In following the school's instructional approach, they rarely present information directly to students and do not correct students' incorrect responses in order for the students to construct their own learning experience. School leaders report that the teachers' instructional activity aligns with the school's expectation that teachers strictly subordinate teaching to learning. Due to lack of daily formative assessment and targeted checks for understanding, it is unclear whether students are learning the requisite ELA skills through day-to-day instruction.

Despite the school's fidelity to the idea of guiding learning through a series of questions, administrators do not require teachers to plan questions in advance or detail how they plan to lead students in the learning process. Teachers create a set of "weekly lesson plans" that provide an overview of the lessons that will be taught in a given week; however, professional developers only require teachers to expand one lesson per week to any significant level of detail. Further, there is no scheduled time for teachers and teaching assistants to plan together and there is no clear expectation of coordination even though the assistants are responsible for leading small group learning activities.

Small group lessons are generally ineffective. In a class of 20-25 students, as many as four adults facilitate small group instruction. In a few instances, this staffing results in purposeful differentiated instruction. In many classes, however, the small-group teacher-student interaction lacks focus and rigor, and students do not engage in ongoing, intentional activity. In some classes, multiple teachers use the same materials and instructional techniques, resulting in little added value from breaking students into small groups. With some exception, the classroom teacher immersed him/herself in one small group without overseeing overall classroom activity. Teachers do not always maximize learning time due to lagging transitions and not adequately matching instructional materials to each member of a group's skill level; for example, some students finish an assigned independent task much quicker than others finish and then wait for the rest to catch up, with no purposeful activity in which to engage in the meantime.

While the Gattengo approach focuses on a special kind of teacher-student dynamic to support the individual learning styles and patterns of students, it is unclear whether many inexperienced teachers have the pedagogical ability to balance strongly encouraging individual student exploration and discovery with keeping focus on moving deliberately toward a desired learning outcome. Again, given the discrete, well-defined skills in mathematics instruction coupled with intrinsic opportunities for discovery in using the manipulatives, the method is effective in generating solid student achievement in mathematics. The method appears to be less effective in ELA because of the challenge of focusing on amorphous reading skills and relying on a variety of teachers and assistant teachers to provide this instruction.

1. E Instructional Leadership

Bronx Better Learning has strong instructional leadership; however, instructional leaders focus on the challenges of implementing the Gattengo pedagogical approach rather than assisting teachers in building skills that will likely lead to measurable student achievement.

In his second year, Bronx Better Learning's executive director has increased communication and collaboration of the school's administration and leadership. The introduction of the ANet testing program and the use of tighter individual teacher growth plans establish an environment of high expectations for student achievement and teacher performance in implementing the Gattengo

method. The school's leadership team meets weekly in order to facilitate more collaborative decision-making. The team conducts an annual review and evaluation of the school's academic program at an end-of-year retreat. The leadership team identified a set of priorities for this year: rigor, data driven instruction, student achievement and student empowerment as well as a clear idea of the services the school would provide. Various members of the leadership team report that these priorities have remained a school focus.

The school's professional developers, who act as the school's primary instructional leaders, have in place a comprehensive system for providing direct, ongoing support to classroom teachers. The teachers generally receive weekly observations, critical feedback and coaching from the professional development specialists. The teachers and the specialists meet weekly to discuss teachers' progress toward attaining individual professional development goals in the subordination of teaching to learning instructional approach. For example, one teacher reported working on questioning strategies with a coach; the coach discussed strategies with the teacher, modeled these strategies, observed the teacher and gave feedback on her implementation. In addition, Bronx Better Learning utilizes a number of outside consultants to supplement the professional development program regularly provided to teachers. The consultants include individuals with expertise in reading, writing, mathematics and social studies.

The school's leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas. Teachers for Kindergarten through 2nd grade have grade-level planning periods twice a week and teachers in 3rd to 5th grade have weekly content area planning meetings, which professional developers regularly attend. Additionally, teachers meet biannually across grades for vertical planning.

This year, each classroom has a teaching assistant with responsibility for providing instruction to individual students and small groups, covering classes during teacher absences, grading classroom-level tests and assisting with classroom and lesson preparation. Though teaching assistants attend bi-weekly grade-level professional development sessions in which professional development specialists and teachers address current issues as well as general practice, they do not meet with the grade-level teachers, who meet twice weekly among themselves, to plan lessons.

Professional developers regularly conduct teacher evaluations with clear criteria that identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The executive director and principal conduct one or two formal observations of teachers during the course of the school year, depending on their experience and pedagogical strength. They base the evaluation on an observation rubric that addresses the quality of observed instruction as well as a number of more general dimensions, which draw on comments during the course of the school year from the rest of the leadership team. Notwithstanding the teaching assistants' instructional responsibilities, the principal, who evaluates all the assistants, uses a rubric that only addresses professionalism, behavior management and attitude rather than their pedagogical competence. Further, teachers report that they do not have input into the teaching assistant evaluations.

Bronx Better Learning holds teachers accountable for quality instruction. At the end of the last school year, the executive director did not rehire three teachers, based on the pedagogical performance and management skills. He did not report that student achievement was a factor in the determinations.

Despite providing a well-developed and sustained system of teacher coaching, the focus of the instructional leaders remains on supporting teachers in implementing the Gattegno approach. The approach is not currently effective in raising the level of student achievement in English language arts.

1. F At-Risk Students

Bronx Better Learning has a clear process for identifying, and a defined set of services for, students who are at-risk of academic failure; however, school leaders have no criteria in place to evaluate the efficacy of the program.

Both administrators and teachers understand well the school's process for identifying students at risk of academic failure. Both groups report that, in addition to teacher observation, they examine student performance on the various school-wide assessments; if students are not meeting grade level benchmarks they refer them to the Pupil Assistance Team (PAT), which includes the school psychologist who oversees the process, the special education teachers, the principal, a grade-level support teacher and the professional developers. The team meets with the referring teacher and the parent to brainstorm strategies for supporting the academic growth of the child. If adjustments to classroom instruction do not improve the child's academic performance, school leaders will then implement a more detailed and robust action plan for accelerating the student's learning. Bronx Better Learning follows the protocol for the identification of students who might be in need of English Language Learner (ELL) support and tests their English language acquisition, when appropriate.

The school tiers the instructional support for at-risk students. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) receive push-in or pull-out services based on their plans; those with PAT referrals participate in small groups with the academic support teachers generally in their classrooms. The school's three English Language Learners receive ongoing academic support from the school's English-as-a-second-language coordinator. With the small number of identified students, the school does not have a stand-alone ELL program; however, the coordinator does monitor the progress of the three students.

School leaders have allotted sufficient resources to support the education of at-risk students at the school. They have hired three Special Education Teacher Technology Specialists (SETTS) teachers, which has enabled students to receive timely support that aligns to their IEP goals. The professional developers work collaboratively with all teachers to modify curriculum and instruction in order to enhance student learning. Currently, the school is unable to meet all the needs of students who receive occupational or physical therapy, because New York City officials closed the local clinic that provided this service. School leaders, however, are working closely with the district's Committee on Special Education to identify an alternative location for the students.

The staff and faculty at Bronx Better Learning meet monthly to review the performance of students who are at-risk of academic failure. A review of the minutes from the meetings show that they discuss individual student progress, brainstorm strategies for ongoing support and address identified gaps in their approach to serving at-risk students. Nevertheless, school leaders do not have clear performance benchmarks that they use to determine the overall effectiveness of these processes and programs. They rely instead primarily on their and the teachers' professional

judgment about student progress to determine success. Based on a review of last year's statewide assessments, at-risk student performance is similar in both English language arts and mathematics to that of their peers in the general school population.

1. G Student Order and Discipline:

Bronx Better Learning promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.

Bronx Better Learning is safe and orderly. The school displays documented expectations for student behavior throughout the school. A student discipline policy is in place and teachers apply it consistently. Classroom procedures promote a culture in which learning is valued. A limited number of teachers tolerate students who opt out of learning, particularly during small group and independent practice.

1. F Professional Development

Bronx Better Learning has a rigorous professional development program for implementing the school's pedagogical approach; however, it is unclear if this narrow focus will result in improved student achievement.

Professional development is rigorous and continual at Bronx Better Learning, though limited in focus. The primary purpose of professional development is to build teachers' capacity to implement the Gattegno method. Because school leaders are aware of the challenges of learning the method, they have put in place an integrated approach for supporting teachers. The school has three in-house professional developers in math, reading and writing who have extensive experience implementing the model. Teachers and school administrators report that the staff developers provide one-to-one support to teachers, model lessons, facilitate group workshop sessions and conduct study groups, as well as ongoing feedback to the faculty about their instructional practice. School documents show that the staff developers regularly provide the faculty with specific, detailed written feedback about their practice.

A significant element of teacher development is the establishment of the Jumpstart program, an intensive training program designed to provide teachers with the tools and conceptual framework for implementing the Gattegno method. Teachers who participate in the program spend one semester as an intern, receiving extensive coaching and mentoring from the staff developers before assuming regular teaching assignments as a way to build their comfort and proficiency with the school's instructional approach.

Professional development also includes Performance PLUS discussions at lunchtime meetings when teachers and developers explore using it as a curriculum and instruction tool. The developers also hold school institutes every two weeks with alternating grade-level and content topics. SETTS and support teachers report that the professional development offerings have helped them to understand how to better differentiate instruction for their particular small groups. The school does not provide targeted professional development for teaching assistants who also provide instructional support to students. Teachers report that other than participating in the bi-weekly

institute meetings or checking in with the lead teachers, the teaching assistants have very little opportunity to deepen their understanding or build their proficiency with the Gattegno method.

2. C Organizational Capacity

Bronx Better Learning continues to have a complex organization. Since his tenure began, the executive director has made the school's systems and procedures more integrated and functional; however, the organization of instruction at the classroom level does not maximize the use of available staff for delivering the academic program.

The executive director has tightened the organization of instruction, especially in establishing assessment systems, in implementing the curriculum and coordinating the various functions of the academic program. He holds regular ongoing meetings in leadership, technology, research and development, student support, student discipline and the library to ensure adequate coordination. He has endeavored to define explicitly the roles and responsibilities of the school's leadership and staff members. Nevertheless, given *ad hoc* demands on staff assignments, the roles of some staff members do not align with their responsibilities. The role of instructional supervisor and head teacher has evolved. More importantly, classroom teachers are not clear about their responsibility in overseeing the teaching assistant program in their classroom.

With the reporting structure separating within-classroom personnel, the level of coordination enjoyed elsewhere in the school structure is not as manifest at the classroom level. At the time of the last evaluation visit, the responsibility of the principal and teaching assistants focused on behavior management and their role in implementing the academic program, especially the instructional approach, was limited; however, the assistants in leading small groups now have critical instructional responsibilities. The school is just beginning to take steps to integrate planning and collaboration in the classroom; for example, this year, the leadership team has added an item about classroom planning activity in teacher evaluations, but there is currently still no scheduled planning time for teachers and teaching assistants. Again, teachers report that they do not have input into the teaching assistant evaluations and that they lack direction on how to oversee overall classroom activity.

Teacher turnover has notably decreased from previous years. A handful of teachers left the school at the end of last year. Since the executive director joined the staff, the school has successfully recruited, hired and retained teachers. Given the heavy investment in professional development, this change enables the school to sustain its development of teachers in using the school's pedagogical approach. The school has full enrollment with a long waiting list.

Bronx Better Learning's leaders recognize the importance of student achievement in and of itself in determining charter renewal. The school reports that during the 2009-10, the significant decrease in ELA scores resulted from a shift in focus *away* from the school's core pedagogical focus during a school leadership transition when there was a diminution of sound teaching practices, including an absence of rigorous planning, insufficient use of student performance data, inconsistent classroom management and lowered expectations. Nevertheless, it remains unclear, given the challenges of training a critical mass of practitioners, whether the school can prepare students to achieve sufficiently in English language arts using the Gattegno pedagogical approach

2. D Board Oversight

Bronx Better Learning's board of trustees is cognizant of the school's Accountability Plan requirements and effectively oversees the executive director's actions. Nevertheless, it remains focused on fidelity to its mission to implement the Gattegno method, despite continued low student performance in English language arts.

Bronx Better Learning's board meets regularly to provide active oversight of the school. It has adequate skills and expertise; the board meets monthly, conducting its business under the auspices of a variety of committees (including complaint, teacher employment, fund raising, strategic development, finance and policy). A number of committees operate as committees of the whole, especially education.

In selecting a new executive director around the time of the previous school evaluation visit, the board reports that it looked for a candidate who embraced developing pedagogical skills and who understood the importance of ensuring good staff morale. The board's first evaluation of the executive director attests to these concerns as it centers its discussion on teacher turnover, school climate and operations as well as a commitment to the school's mission. Despite the board's awareness of the importance of academic Accountability Plan goals, it issued the evaluation at about the same time as the release the state's assessment results, which are the core component of the Accountability Plan and would presumably factor into the school's evaluation of the school leader. The evaluation does not, in fact, address student achievement.

School board members receive weekly emails from the executive director indicating current educational initiatives, new hires, financial updates and teacher training as well as ANet and Fountas & Pinnell results. They report that he provides academic performance and progress data, along with fiscal and organizational data at board meetings. The board members demonstrate knowledge of the details of school's program. They report now having a sense of urgency and that the executive director has developed an action plan, which he reviews with the board that ultimately focuses on higher student achievement.

APPENDIX A: RENEWAL BENCHMARKS USED DURING THE VISIT

An excerpt of the State University Charter Renewal Benchmarks follows.

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

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

Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1B</p> <p>Use of Assessment Data</p>	<p>The school has a system to gather assessment and evaluation data and uses it to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school regularly uses standardized and other assessments that are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and state performance standards; • the school systematically collects and analyzes data from diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and makes it accessible to teachers, school leaders and the school board; • the school uses protocols, procedures and rubrics that ensure that the scoring of assessments and evaluation of student work is reliable and trustworthy; • the school uses assessment data to predict whether the school's Accountability Plan goals are being achieved; • the school's leaders use assessment data to monitor, change and improve the school's academic program, including curriculum and instruction, professional development, staffing and intervention services; • the school's teachers use assessment data to adjust and improve instruction to meet the identified needs of students; • a common understanding exists between and among teachers and administrators of the meaning and consequences of assessment results, e.g., changes to the instructional program, access to remediation, promotion to the next grade; • the school regularly communicates each student's progress and growth to his or her parents/guardians; and • the school regularly communicates to the school community overall academic performance as well as the school's progress toward meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1C</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>The school has a clearly defined curriculum and uses it to prepare students to meet state performance standards.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a well-defined curriculum framework for each grade and core academic subject, which includes the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve as specified by New York State standards and performance indicators; • the school has carefully analyzed all curriculum resources (including commercial materials) currently in use in relation to the school's curriculum framework,

	<p>identified areas of deficiency and/or misalignment, and addressed them in the instructional program;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the curriculum <i>as implemented</i> is organized, cohesive, and aligned from grade to grade; • teachers are fully aware of the curricula that they are responsible to teach and have access to curricular documents such as scope and sequence documents, pacing charts, and/or curriculum maps that guide the development of their lesson plans; • teachers develop and use lesson plans with objectives that are in alignment with the school's curriculum; • the school has defined a procedure, allocated time and resources, and included teachers in ongoing review and revision of the curriculum; and • the curriculum supports the school's stated mission.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1D</p> <p>Pedagogy</p>	<p>High quality instruction is evident in all classes throughout the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers demonstrate subject-matter and grade-level competency in the subjects and grades they teach; • instruction is rigorous and focused on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do in each lesson; • lesson plans and instruction are aligned to the school's curriculum framework and New York State standards and performance indicators; • instruction is differentiated to meet the range of learning needs represented in the school's student population, e.g. flexible student grouping, differentiated materials, pedagogical techniques, and/or assessments; • all students are cognitively engaged in focused, purposeful learning activities during instructional time; • learning time is maximized (e.g., appropriate pacing, high on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students), transitions are efficient, and there is day-to-day instructional continuity; and • teachers challenge students with questions and assignments that promote academic rigor, depth of understanding, and development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1E</p> <p>Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for student achievement; • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge, pedagogical skills and student achievement); • the school's instructional leaders have in place a comprehensive and on-going system for evaluating teacher quality and effectiveness; • the school's instructional leaders, based on classroom visits and other available data, provide direct ongoing support, such as critical feedback, coaching and/or modeling, to teachers in their classrooms; • the school's leadership provides structured opportunities, resources and guidance for teachers to plan the delivery of the instructional program within and across grade levels as well as within disciplines or content areas; • the school's instructional leaders organize a coherent and sustained professional

	<p>development program that meets the needs of both the school and individual teachers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school's leadership ensures that the school is responding to the needs of at-risk students and maximizing their achievement to the greatest extent possible in the regular education program using in-class resources and/or pull-out services and programs where necessary ; and the school's leadership conducts regular reviews and evaluations of the school's academic program and makes necessary changes to ensure that the school is effectively working to achieve academic standards defined by the State University Renewal Benchmarks in the areas of assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student order and discipline, and professional development.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school is demonstrably effective in helping students who are struggling academically.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school deploys sufficient resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students' needs; all regular education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the regular education program; the school provides sufficient training, resources, and support to all teachers and specialists with regard to meeting the needs of at-risk students; the school has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with the appropriate interventions, and a common understanding among all teachers of these procedures; all regular education teachers demonstrate a working knowledge of students' Individualized Education Program goals and instructional strategies for meeting those goals; the school provides sufficient time and support for on-going coordination between regular and special education teachers, as well as other program specialists and service providers; and the school monitors the performance of student participation in support services using well-defined school-wide criteria, and regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its intervention programs.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1G</p> <p>Student Order & Discipline</p>	<p>The school promotes a culture of learning and scholarship.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has a documented discipline policy that is consistently applied; classroom management techniques and daily routines have established a culture in which learning is valued and clearly evident; low-level misbehavior is not being tolerated, e.g., students are not being allowed to disrupt or opt-out of learning during class time; and throughout the school, a safe and orderly environment has been established.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 1H</p> <p>Professional Development</p>	<p>The school's professional development program assists teachers in meeting student academic needs and school goals by addressing identified shortcomings in teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school provides sufficient time, personnel, materials and funding to support a comprehensive and sustained professional development program; • the content of the professional development program dovetails with the school’s mission, curriculum, and instructional programs; • annual professional development plans derive from a data-driven needs-assessment and staff interests; • professional development places a high priority on achieving the State University Renewal Benchmarks and the school’s Accountability Plan goals; • teachers are involved in setting short-term and long-term goals for their own professional development activities; • the school provides effective, ongoing support and training tailored to teachers’ varying levels of expertise and instructional responsibilities; • the school provides training to assist all teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and other students at-risk of academic failure; and • the professional development program is systematically evaluated to determine its effectiveness at meeting stated goals.
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Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?	
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>State University Renewal Benchmarks</u>
State University Renewal Benchmark 2A Mission & Key Design Elements	<p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders are aware of the mission; • the school has implemented its key design elements in pursuit of its mission; and • the school meets or comes close to meeting any non-academic goals contained in its Accountability Plan.
State University Renewal Benchmark 2B Parents & Students	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school has a process and procedures for evaluation of parent satisfaction with the school; • the great majority of parents with students enrolled at the school have strong positive attitudes about it; • few parents pursue grievances at the school board level or outside the school; • a large number of parents seek entrance to the school; • parents with students enrolled keep their children enrolled year-to-year; and • the school maintains a high rate of daily student attendance.
State University Renewal	<p>The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure with staff, systems, and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic</p>

<p>Benchmark 2C</p> <p>Organizational Capacity</p>	<p>program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school demonstrates effective management of day-to-day operations; • staff scheduling is internally consistent and supportive of the school’s mission; • the school has established clear priorities, objectives and benchmarks for achieving its mission and Accountability Plan goals, and a process for their regular review and revision; • the school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals; • the roles and responsibilities of the school’s leadership and staff members are clearly defined; • the school has an organizational structure that provides clear lines for accountability; • the school’s management has successfully recruited, hired and retained key personnel, and made appropriate decisions about removing ineffective staff members when warranted; • the school maintains an adequate student enrollment and has effective procedures for recruiting new students to the school; and • the school’s management and board have demonstrated effective communication practices with the school community including school staff, parents/guardians and students.
<p>State University Renewal</p> <p>Benchmark 2D</p> <p>Board Oversight</p>	<p>The school board has worked effectively to achieve the school’s mission and provide oversight to the total educational program.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has adequate skills and expertise, as well as adequate meeting time to provide rigorous oversight of the school; • the school board (or a committee thereof) understands the core business of the school—student achievement—in sufficient depth to permit the board to provide effective oversight; • the school board has set clear long-term and short-term goals and expectations for meeting those goals, and communicates them to the school’s management and leaders; • the school board has received regular written reports from the school leadership on academic performance and progress, financial stability and organizational capacity; • the school board has conducted regular evaluations of the school’s management (including school leaders who report to the board, supervisors from management organization(s), and/or partner organizations that provide services to the school), and has acted on the results where such evaluations demonstrated shortcomings in performance; • where there have been demonstrable deficiencies in the school’s academic, organizational or fiscal performance, the school board has taken effective action to correct those deficiencies and put in place benchmarks for determining if the deficiencies are being corrected in a timely fashion; • the school board has not made financial or organizational decisions that have materially impeded the school in fulfilling its mission; and • the school board conducts on-going assessment and evaluation of its own effectiveness in providing adequate school oversight, and pursues opportunities

	for further governance training and development.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2E</p> <p>Governance</p>	<p>The board has implemented and maintained appropriate policies, systems and processes, and has abided by them.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school board has established a set of priorities that are in line with the school’s goals and mission and has effectively worked to design and implement a system to achieve those priorities; • the school board has in place a process for recruiting and selecting new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the school board has implemented a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with those set forth in the charter—and consistently abided by them through the term of the charter; • the school board has generally avoided creating conflicts of interest where possible; where not possible, the school has managed those conflicts of interest in a clear and transparent manner; • the school board has instituted a process for dealing with complaints (and such policy is consistent with that set forth in the charter), has made that policy clear to all stakeholders, and has followed that policy including acting in a timely fashion on any such complaints; • the school board has abided by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee elections, removals and filling of vacancies; • the school board and its committees hold meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and minutes are recorded for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings; and • the school board has in place a set of board and school policies that are reviewed regularly and updated as needed.
<p>State University Renewal Benchmark 2F</p> <p>Legal Requirements</p>	<p>The school has substantially complied with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>Elements that are generally present include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during its charter period, the school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL, and Open Meetings Law; • at the time of renewal, the school is in substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable laws, rules and regulations; • over the charter period, the school has abided by the terms of its monitoring plan; • the school has designed and put in place effective systems and controls to ensure that legal and charter requirements were and are met; and • the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house or independent legal counsel that reviews relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and makes recommendations and handles other legal matters as

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