

STEAL



Seven Ways NYC's "Renewal Schools" Can Learn from Great Public Charter Schools

November 2014



**NEW YORK CITY
CHARTER SCHOOL
CENTER**

It's about great public schools.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE

This month, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a new School Renewal Program to improve 94 of the city’s most struggling schools. The program includes versions of three practices that are hallmarks of top charter schools, but a comparison of Renewal School plans to charter school practices reveals consistent differences in urgency and intensity. As NYC DOE continues to define, implement and strengthen this high-stakes program, as well as prepare support and turnaround plans for hundreds of other schools, charter schools stand ready to share their work.

1 Dedicated Instructional Leaders



Principal is short for “principal teacher.” Successful charter schools free their principals to focus on instruction by training capable operations leaders in each building. Charter principals are then evaluated, and replaced if necessary, based largely on academic results. Similarly, NYC DOE will provide its Renewal Schools with “operational support, enabling principals to focus on supporting their teachers to ensure rigorous classroom instruction.”ⁱ NYC DOE intends to give principals “intensive” coaching and de Blasio pledges that “if these efforts do not work, we will... remove principals and other school leaders, and put in leaders who will get the job done.”ⁱⁱ

What NYC DOE plans to do:

Let principals focus more on instruction. Replace ineffective leaders if supports fail.

What great charter schools do:

Let principals focus full-time on instruction. Replace ineffective principals.

Charter Spotlight: UNCOMMON SCHOOLS

“Uncommon schools are organized, top to bottom, to maximize the amount of time devoted to instruction and learning. **The network frees principals to devote almost all their time to instruction through an unusual dual leadership structure.** Each school has a director of operations as well as a principal, both of whom are considered equals and who undergo one-year apprenticeships before assuming their duties. While the principal concentrates on instruction and learning, the director of operations runs everything else in the school, from budget and discipline, to fire drills, lunch menus and building maintenance.”

~ From the Broad Prize report, *Uncommon Schools: Turning Urban Schools Into Springboards to College* (2014), pp. 9-10 ⁱⁱⁱ

2 Extended Time for Instruction

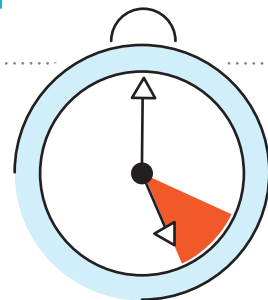
The City’s new contract with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) actually reduces daily instructional time, while increasing time for teacher training and “peer-to-peer coaching.” UFT President Michael Mulgrew praised that bargain, in contrast to what he called “this political punch line – more time with the student.”^{iv} Yet charter schools have shown the value of both more and better time with students. NYC DOE is now following suit; Renewal School students will receive an hour of additional instruction each day, plus access to new academic summer programs.

What NYC DOE plans to do:

Extend the school day by one hour. Add academic summer programs.

What great charter schools do:

Extend the school day by up to three hours. Extend the school year to begin in August. Ensure consistent quality of instruction across extended schedule.



Charter Spotlight: KIPP AND OTHERS

Though Michael Mulgrew may sniff at extended learning time, union-affiliated researchers cite its power as a key reason for charter schools’ success—provided there is *enough* extra time. As Matt di Carlo of the Albert Shanker Institute points out, in major charter school networks, such as KIPP, “**we’re not just talking about an additional week or two of school. We’re talking about additional months.**” By adding 2-3 hours to the regular public school day, which is usually 6-7 hours, most of the big name [charter networks] offer 30-50 percent more time in school, the regular public school equivalent of up to four months.”^v

3 Limited Time to Perform (or Be Closed)

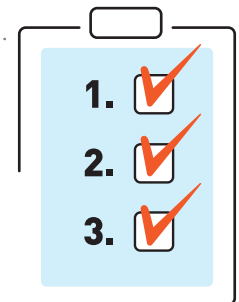
No school should be allowed to fail its students indefinitely. For NYC DOE Renewal Schools, de Blasio announced that “[i]f we do not see improvement after three years— and after all of these reforms and new resources—we will close any schools that don’t measure up.” However, many important details remain unannounced, such as: 1) How school improvement will actually be measured, and how much improvement will be enough; 2) What is the earliest school year a school would actually be closed; and 3) Whether principal replacements will delay accountability. Charter schools are held accountable through closure if necessary, but always operate under an accountability plan that includes strict and explicit academic goals and timelines—allowing both school communities and the public to understand, from the very beginning, how high-stakes decisions will be made.

What NYC DOE plans to do:

Give struggling schools a three-year window to show unspecified improvement or be closed.

What great charter schools do:

Meet academic goals or be closed, according to a fixed term (often 3 years for a struggling school). Work toward clear metrics with explicit timelines.



Charter Spotlight: AUTHORIZERS

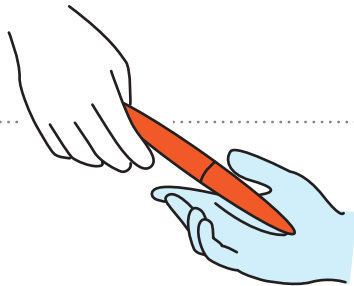
“A Quality Authorizer executes charter contracts that plainly... **Establish the performance standards under which schools will be evaluated...**; Define clear, measurable, and attainable academic, financial, and organizational performance standards and targets that the school must meet as a condition of renewal... ; Define the sources of academic data that will form the evidence base for ongoing and renewal evaluation...”

~National Association of Charter School Authorizers, *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2012), p. 15^{vi}

WHY STOP THERE?

Although the general shape of the School Renewal Program has already been announced, revisions can be made at any time. Moreover, the New York State Education Department has charged NYC DOE with creating improvement plans for hundreds of additional schools. Those plans are due in December. **There are four other key strategies that NYC DOE should appropriate from top charter schools.**

4 Team Technique



With a committed and qualified team of teachers in place, top charter schools expect them to work that way: as a team. That starts by planning together as a team for weeks during the summer, before students arrive. It also happens by sharing the technical materials of teaching—curricula, lesson plans, instruction (recorded on video) and data on progress—often using online tools. When teachers can instantly access their colleagues’ best work, they can improve faster and focus on refining instead of re-inventing. At NYC DOE schools, principals can ask teachers to arrive early but teachers are not required to begin work until the Tuesday after Labor Day, only two days before students arrive. NYC DOE principals are also forbidden from collecting lesson plans “in a mechanical or routinized manner” and must obtain each teacher’s consent in order to record instruction on video.^{vii}

What great charter schools do:
Make time for team planning during the summer and throughout the year. Share technical materials team-wide.

What NYC DOE can do:
Bargain with union to bring teachers back to school before Labor Day and ease restrictions on lesson plan collection and video sharing.

Charter Spotlight: ACHIEVEMENT FIRST

“Teachers [in the U.S. have]... [n]o agreement on what their work should aim to teach, no common vocabulary to describe how to do it, and no standard measures to know whether they had succeeded. ...[But at] the Achievement First charter schools in New York and Connecticut, [researcher] Seneca [Rosenberg] found further evidence of a developing infrastructure. ... **The program offered Achievement First teachers not only standards, but infrastructure; not only support, but coherent support.** ... [An AF] teacher had a framework around which to build each day’s lesson; prewritten interim assessments to get a regular peek inside her students’ minds; special designated data days to dig into the results; and an army of colleagues to help her think through the problems that teaching presented every day.”

~Elizabeth Green, *Building a Better Teacher* (2014), p. 236

5 Frequent Feedback

Teacher improvement happens in cycles of classroom practice and expert feedback, but top charter schools understand these cycles must be frequent and rapid for maximum effect.

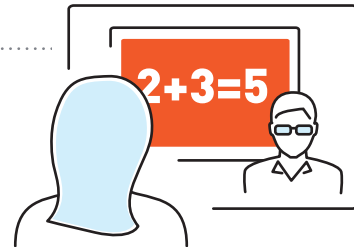
When school leaders are free to be full-time, hands-on instructional leaders, they can spend their days in constant observation and coaching of teachers. NYC DOE principals are allowed to make unlimited “informal observations” of teachers’ classrooms, but with conditions: principals must observe for at least 15 minutes and write up a report after the observation, but may not alter the negotiated work schedule in response to an observed problem.^{viii} Charter school principals, by contrast, are free to conduct rapid observations without paperwork requirements, and may adjust teachers’ work schedules as needed to make time for professional development.

What great charter schools do:

Let leaders give teachers constant observations, feedback and opportunities for deliberate practice.

What NYC DOE can do:

Bargain with union to extend planning time, allow faster informal observations and reduce paperwork requirements.



Charter Spotlight: SUCCESS ACADEMIES

“Cycle of Teacher Improvement... Step One: Speed Observations (Round One) ... a series of rapid, back-to-back observations lasting no more than five to ten minutes each. **Step Two: Study Groups** ... [of teachers] to discuss how to prepare for and teach this lesson... **Step Three: Teach-backs** ... “[Teachers] take turns teaching a portion of the lesson to each other... [with] clear, direct feedback... **Step Four: Labsites [T]eachers** ... practice teaching actual kids while being coached by the principal ... **Step Five: Speed Observations (Round Two)** The leader returns to the same teachers’ classrooms the next day...” **Step Six: Individual Coaching** ... “[I]ndividual support and coaching as needed”...

~ Eva Moskowitz and Arin Lavinia, *Mission Possible: How the Secrets of Success Academies Can Work in Any School*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012. pp. 43-45^x

6 Selective Staffing

A true turnaround entails dramatic change, and not every teacher will be professionally or emotionally prepared. In reviving PS.6, now-Chancellor Carmen Fariña provoked high turnover:

“Since her arrival in 1991, [by 1999] Mrs. Fariña has replaced 80 percent of her staff, a rare feat in public school, where teachers have tenure and the right to transfer by seniority. She did it, she said, by persuasion. ‘Once you create a climate in a building that is hard-working, people will find out whether they are comfortable with it or not,’ Mrs. Fariña said. ‘And then they have decisions to make.’”^x

Although NYC DOE will have 94 Renewal Schools, and more than 200 additional schools on state watch-lists, to date only two schools have plans for significant staff replacements—and these through an elaborate committee process that includes teachers’ union representatives. At charter schools, teacher replacement is much more common and much simpler, with a school’s new leaders quickly replacing as many teachers as they deem necessary to carry out a plan for rapid improvement.

What great charter schools do:

Give school leaders full authority over teacher hiring and removal.

What NYC DOE can do:

Support principals’ requests for personnel changes, with buyouts if necessary. Do not encourage and reward teacher retention for its own sake.



Charter Spotlight: DEMOCRACY PREP

“Ben Lambert founded Harlem Day Charter School in 2001. Nine years and nine principals later, just a quarter of students were proficient on the state math exam, and even fewer on the state reading exam. Knowing [potential closure] was only a matter of time... [Lambert offered to] replace his board—including himself—and turn the school over to a new operator. The authorizer, the State University of New York, agreed.... [New operator] Democracy Prep spent a lot of time meeting with parents to discuss student achievement, which was the first time that many parents heard that their child was performing below grade level. ... Democracy Prep took over a revised charter in June, which renamed the school Harlem Prep. ... **When classes started in September, four of the 34 instructional staff members returned...**”

~Daniela Doyle and Tim Field, from *The Role of Charter Restarts in School Reform* (2013), p. 26^{xi}

7 Parents with Purpose

Parents can be schools' most powerful partners in improving student achievement, but only if they understand how.

Instead of parent-teacher conferences that happen 2-4 times per year, top charter schools expect teachers to use calls, notes, and online tools to communicate with parents on a near-*daily* basis. This communication is positive as well as constructive, and it goes both ways; a common charter school policy is to respond to any parent call or email within 24 hours. At NYC DOE, by contrast, such intense communication cannot be required of teachers, who can be fully compliant with the teachers' contract by devoting 40 minutes to parent engagement every Tuesday.^{xii} While many individual teachers choose to go beyond this requirement because of their personal professionalism, there is no formal expectation that all teachers will or should consistently do so.

What great charter schools do:

Involve parents in academics and respond quickly to their questions.

What NYC DOE can do:

Create a culture of urgency and academic focus that extends to teachers' partnerships with every family.



Charter Spotlight: BRONX CHARTER SCHOOL FOR EXCELLENCE

"BCSE is a very demanding school with high expectations for academics and behavior. All of us – parents, the leadership team and teachers – are working hard to help our scholars climb 'the mountain' to college. Thus, we believe that the staff and parents are partners. It has been proven that when adults partner work cooperatively together we can ensure the success of each scholar. Communication is a vital component to our partnership. If there's a problem or concern, speak with the teacher first to solve it together. ... **It is BCSE policy for a staff member to make every attempt to get back to you within 24 hours after receiving your call or email.**"

~Bronx Charter School for Excellence,
Family Handbook 2014-15, p. 18^{xiii}

SHARING OUR WORK

Every day in New York City, successful charter schools are sharing their work and insights. It happens formally and informally, through numerous channels including:

- Professional development sessions sponsored by effective charter schools and networks;
- Formal partnerships with district schools, including through the New York State Charter Dissemination Grant and New York City Learning Partners Program;
- Teacher preparation at the Relay Graduate School of Education, an accredited institution founded by charter practitioners;
- School tours and events sponsored by NYC Collaborates, an initiative of New York City's District-Charter Collaboration Compact; and
- Published books, DVDs, and research studies.

Charter schools do not have the power to change NYC DOE rules and structures. Nevertheless, charter school educators stand ready to continue sharing with—and learning from—their peers in district schools.

As one charter network leader recently put it, "There's nothing proprietary here."^{xiv} In other words: steal this plan.

For more information about NYC charter schools and their programs, contact the New York City Charter School Center, 212-437-8300, or visit www.nyccharterschools.org

The NYC Charter School Bookshelf

Despite its small size, the NYC charter school sector has sparked the publication of at least a dozen books, including practical guides for educators as well as histories and memoirs. Here are seven titles to get started; for a longer reading list, visit www.nyccharterschools.org/bookshelf.

Driven by Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction

by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo

Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools

by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo

Mission Possible: How the Secrets of Success Academy Can Work in Any School

by Eva Moskowitz and Arin Lavinia

Teach Like a Champion 2.0: 62 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College

by Doug Lemov

The Together Teacher: Plan Ahead, Get Organized, and Save Time!

by Maia Heyck-Merlin

Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America

by Paul Tough

Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America

by Jay Mathews

Notes

ⁱ Press release of November 3, 2014, Office of the NYC Mayor. Available online at <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/904-14/pledging-stronger-public-schools-mayor-de-blasio-school-renewal-program>. See also School Renewal Program description, available online at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/RenewalSchool>.

ⁱⁱ Prepared remarks, available online courtesy of Chalkbeat New York at <http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2014/11/03/read-mayor-bill-de-blasios-speech-outlining-a-150m-plan-for-school-improvement/#.VFf8bjTF-ZM>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Available online at <http://broadprize.org/asset/1864-un-commonschoolswhitepaper.pdf>.

^{iv} Wall, Patrick. “Educators question contract’s bet on teacher training over student tutoring.” Chalkbeat New York, May 5, 2014. Available online at <http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2014/05/05/educators-question-contracts-bet-on-teacher-training-over-student-tutoring/#.VFf8bjTF-ZM>.

^v Available online at <http://shankerblog.org/?p=9918>.

^{vi} Available online at http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/images/stories/publications/Principles.Standards.2012_pub.pdf.

^{vii} NYC DOE teaching and teacher observation rules are defined by a series of contracts, memoranda, New York State Education Commissioner’s Decisions, arbitrators’ decisions, and other materials resulting from negotiations between NYC DOE and the teachers union. The union’s plain-language summary of the lesson plan rules is available online at <http://www.uft.org/news/clari-fication-lesson-plans>. Video recording restrictions can be found on p.9 of the 2014 Contract Memorandum of Understanding, available online at <http://www.uft.org/files/attachments/final-complete-moa-contract-2014.pdf>.

^{viii} NYC DOE teaching and teacher observation rules are defined by a series of contracts, memoranda, New York State Education Commissioner’s Decisions, arbitrators’ decisions, and other materials resulting from negotiations between NYC DOE and the teachers union. The

union’s plain-language summary of the observation rules is available online at <http://www.uft.org/our-rights/know-your-rights/classroom-observations>.

^{ix} Preview available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=Cl04nbRevHwC&pg=PA43&lpg=PA43&dq=mission+possible+cycle+of+teacher&source=bl&ots=H-BlpPNkyYQ&sig=FdlwzQD7CvBdaGsVZ9FN-B4GKvEA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=UrVXVLvvG6vdsASbx4K-ACw&ved=0CEUQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=mission%20possible%20cycle%20of%20teacher&f=false>.

^x Hartocollis, Anemona. “A principal with a will of steel makes a public school as prestigious as a private one.” The New York Times, February 24, 1999. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/24/nyregion/school-principal-with-will-steel-makes-public-school-prestigious-private-one.html>.

^{xi} Full title: The role of charter restarts in school reform: Honoring our commitments to students and public accountability. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact; and Washington, DC: New Schools Venture Fund. Available online at http://www.newschools.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/the_role_of_charter_restarts_in_school_reform.pdf.

^{xii} NYC DOE teaching rules are defined by a series of contracts, memoranda, New York State Education Commissioner’s Decisions, arbitrators’ decisions, and other materials resulting from negotiations between NYC DOE and the teachers union. The union’s plain-language summary of the current workday rules is available online at <http://www.uft.org/contract-2014/repurposed-workday>.

^{xiii} Available online at http://www.bronxexcellence.org/files/user/2/file/BCSE_Family_Handbook_2014_2015_FINAL.pdf.

^{xiv} Uncommon Schools CEO Brett Peiser, quoted in Capital New York, November 11, 2014: “Charter group hosts training, pointedly, for district teachers only.” Available online at <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2014/11/8556035/charter-group-hosts-training-pointedly-district-teachers-only>.



A program of:

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