



The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning Awarded 2016 - 2019 New York State Education Department Charter School Dissemination Grant

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning (Bronx Better Learning) has been awarded a 2016 - 2019 New York State Education Department Charter School Dissemination Grant. The \$500,000 grant will fund the dissemination of effective practices and programs that the school has developed, tested, and proved successful. Bronx Better Learning, a public charter school in the North Bronx, will share its successful innovations via designated partnerships with two New York City district schools.

Bronx Better Learning practices an approach to mathematics called "Visible and Tangible Mathematics." First developed by Dr. Caleb Gattegno in the early 1960's, the program is firmly rooted in scientifically-proven, well-established methodology. By relying heavily on the use of manipulatives, primarily Cuisenaire rods, teachers ensure that children develop models for thinking mathematically, thereby providing them with a sound basis for accomplishing the following objectives: becoming swift and accurate in their computation skills while focusing on problem solving activities that involve real world application of those skills.

Over the past two years, Bronx Better Learning has begun to incorporate, into its mathematics instruction, a prototype digital iPad application, named iCountBetter Lite. Available for free on Apple's iTunes store, the application's design enables students to investigate how to read and write numerals up to one billion, further promoting their mathematical proficiency and insight. Bronx Better Learning additionally has integrated fully into its primary grade ELA instruction the use of iSpellBetter. That full-fledged application, also available through iTunes as an iPhone app, engages students in a game-like study of spelling. Both apps are the property of Bronx Better Learning.

To fulfill the purpose of the New York State Education Department Charter School Dissemination Grant, Bronx Better Learning will partner with P.S. 111 (Seton Falls Elementary School) and P.S. 112 (Bronxwood School) to support their efforts to increase their students' achievement in mathematics. Bronx Better Learning will provide the other two public schools with free copies of the full version of iCountBetter, which will add, to numeration, the topics of counting and number sense. The app's further development will be supported through the grant. Bronx Better Learning will train the other schools' teachers, during the summer months and school year, in strategies that integrate and leverage its digital curriculum.

Bronx Better Learning, while serving a 99% minority population, with a poverty rate exceeding 80%, consistently and significantly outperforms its resident school district in mathematics and ELA. Furthermore, its students' achievement in mathematics, the focus of the dissemination grant, far exceeds that of New York State overall.

The school, authorized by the State University of New York through its Charter Schools Institute, opened its doors in the fall of 2003. Faced with an annual waiting list of close to 2,400 students, Bronx Better Learning's Board of Trustees applied for, and was granted, the authority to open a second, replication school, the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning 2, which just completed its first year of operation.

According to Bronx Better Learning's lead founder, Dr. Theodore (Ted) Swartz, who currently serves as the Director of Professional Development for both of the charter schools, the adopted instruction approach takes most teachers several years to master. Referring to it generally as the "subordination of teaching to learning," he describes it as "a progressive pedagogy, with scripted lessons avoided in place of teachers' creatively responding to student learning as it evolves in real-time and a reliance on careful pre-planning as preparation to meet the unexpected." He adds, "We look for teaching to be guided by learning, rather than attempt to control or steer it."

Dr. Swartz will serve as the Project Director for the dissemination grant. He says he welcomes the infusion of funding as Bronx Better Learning's best way to scale its approach to other schools, and non-traditional learning environments, everywhere. "The digital applications we have and are developing replicate substantially the proven, highly successful learning experiences our two schools offer students, without the high cost and extended time it otherwise takes to properly train teachers in Dr. Gattegno's approach," he says. Dr. Swartz further states, "For teachers committed to understanding how to subordinate their teaching to their students' learning, our school's digital apps provide an additional resource to develop the children's independence, autonomy and sense of responsibility."