



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Leadership Academy High School

**High School 525
1710 Webster Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Kenneth Gaskins Jr

Dates of review: March 5 – 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Isobel McGregor

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Leadership Academy is a high school with 636 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 44% Black, 53% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 87.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school sets high expectations for students, especially in terms of their potential to succeed and excel.
- Responding to the high expectations, students, including special education students, attain good levels of achievement with high graduation rates.
- The school celebrates students' personal developments and achievements, for example in attendance or college entrance.
- The school has an inclusive approach, ensuring that all students are treated equally and receive the support required for them to make progress.
- Students respond well to staff's support for them, are polite and courteous, and achieve high standards of personal presentation.
- The principal demonstrates charismatic and dynamic leadership, to which the school community responds very positively.
- Senior staff work hard to maintain a smooth-running school and, along with all other staff, to promote the well-being of students.
- A strong focus is placed on professional development, including of new teachers, to support staff's focus on student performance.
- School leaders successfully direct resources to areas of identified need, including student support and teacher professional development.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the school-wide database so that it is capable of producing key performance data in summary form and by groupings of gender and ethnicity.
- Provide further training to staff in the interpretation of data and how to use findings to plan next steps at departmental and individual teacher levels.
- Ensure that school goals have interim targets and timeframes, are shared with staff and are used to drive departmental plans and targets as appropriate.
- Continue to develop teachers' understanding of differentiation and their capacity to adapt instruction successfully to the needs of individual students.
- Ensure teachers negotiate next learning steps with individual students, ensuring that the agreed targets are time-related, specific and measurable.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Bronx Leadership Academy is a small high school characterized by ambitious students, high graduation levels and dedicated and caring staff. Under the direction of the universally liked and respected principal, staff provide good support to students to ensure that they perform to the highest level of which they are capable. The vast majority of students responds well, is polite and courteous and demonstrates belief in their own potential. Senior staff are assiduous in their attempts to keep the school running smoothly and to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning. School and departmental goals and plans are not yet fully developed, for example through the addition of measurable targets and timeframes. Professional development activities are successfully addressing those instructional needs that require further attention. These include supporting staff in the use of student data to plan future work and promoting staff's effectiveness in setting precise learning targets and shaping lessons to individual students' needs.

The school has addressed most of the areas recommended for improvement in the last Quality Review. A school-wide database is under development. Record keeping and lesson plans have improved. Classrooms have been enhanced by the addition of helpful learning support charts and examples of good work from students. The school continues to work to improve attendance. Further work is required to ensure that lessons are differentiated to meet the needs of all students.

The school has set up an inquiry team which is looking closely at the work of a targeted group of junior year students performing on the borderline of proficiency. The team is using on-line test result data, students' class work and homework to examine performance in detail, review teaching approaches and plan next steps for the student. This team has a highly professional approach and is developing expertise that is already having an impact on data use and instruction.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

School leaders gather a range of data on the performance of all students, including special education students, in the current and in previous years. They scrutinize information on student performance in Regents' examinations and interim assessments for each teacher's classes. These processes allow them to maintain a good knowledge of how individual students are progressing. The school recently appointed a part-time

data reviewer, who is beginning to provide data for scrutiny by the school cabinet. Further work on extending the range and format of analyses, and on producing high-level summarizing data, remains to be done. The principal takes account of the performance of students in similar schools, especially if a particular subject area has been identified as an area of concern. Attendance data is gathered and scrutinized carefully. The school holds strongly to the belief that all students should be seen as individuals. For that reason, staff rarely look at student performance by ethnic or gender groupings, so do not have a complete understanding of the school's performance.

Teachers inform themselves well on the progress of their students and on previous performance levels. They scrutinize a range of data, such as interim assessments, mock Regents, homework assignments and information from middle schools. The school has introduced an on-line assessment program. Results have provided teachers with useful information on students' performance and progress in specific skills and on their curriculum, through an item analysis feature. Further training in interpreting data is planned. The work of the inquiry team in this regard is a useful model for all teachers on allying such technologically generated data with more qualitative classroom information on students' progress.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school goals, as articulated by the principal and in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan, arise from analyses of available data. They focus clearly on improving student performance in specific subject areas, increasing attendance levels and improving the ways teachers use data to provide differentiated instruction. Plans for individual students' next learning steps are developed but do not include specific, measurable goals. Following a school focus, plans for special education students are now reviewed regularly. However, those for the whole school do not yet have interim targets and measurable objectives to help chart progress. Staff understand the goals in general, but do not have ownership of the specific ways in which goals will be achieved, nor their own role in that process. Goals are not yet shared specifically with other members of the school community.

The school pays good attention to reviewing courses and allocating students to classes to help them improve their performance. For students requiring intensive work, the school has set up additional classes in English language arts or increased the number of lessons in a week. There have also been more radical changes, such as students taking Regents' examinations in United States history in an earlier grade than previously. Such measures are helping improve performance.

The school has very high expectations of what students will achieve. The positive response to expectations is evidenced by high graduation rates, including for special education students, college acceptance rates and impressive personal presentation in dress and tidiness. Successes for individual student's perfect attendance or college acceptance are well celebrated by the school and provide renewed aspirations for younger students. Led dynamically by the principal, staff encourage students to be ambitious and live up to the school's name by becoming leaders in whatever societal context they find themselves. Parents share these expectations for their children and appreciated the regular reports they get on their child's progress. Almost all students

respond very positively and are ambitious for themselves and their peers. One student remarked, "We are all expected to graduate."

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The work of teachers and students is well focused on the achievement of good levels of performance in Regents' examinations. The curriculum is enriched in post Regents' stages through electives in a range of contexts such as art and music, photography, film and media, the law and ethnic studies. In core areas, more teachers are becoming more confident in their capacity to set tasks and activities which suit students' differing needs. However, differentiation is not yet well established across the school. In a number of cases, staff set appropriately challenging or supporting tasks for students within the classroom. A good range of support strategies is in place beyond the classroom context. Students receive tutoring in after-school classes, on Saturdays, through summer school or in an intensive 6-week preparation for Regents' examinations. The principal has recently engaged older students in tutoring younger students, to the benefit of both groups. School leaders have taken appropriate budgeting decisions to promote the continued improvement of student performance and staff expertise.

There is obvious respect and trust between staff and students. School leaders have a policy of welcoming students warmly to the school each morning. Their movements around the school engender greetings and conversational exchanges, all of which strengthen links and attachment to the school. Parents indicated that they also felt welcomed. "This school feels like a family", said one. Good arrangements are in place to encourage attendance. The school contacts parents promptly in the case of absence, about which parents expressed satisfaction. Guidelines are in place for more intensive measures to be initiated in cases of longer absence. The school has a system of rewards and punishments for attendance and tardiness. There is good celebration of students' success in attendance, as well as in academic contexts. Despite these considerable efforts, however, levels of attendance have remained static.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

There is an accepted school policy on the use of observation of instruction and learning as a strategy for professional development. This includes formal and informal observation by senior staff, teachers visiting each other's classes and demonstration lessons. Some departments have lessons videoed, by students in the photography course, so that the department can discuss techniques. In science, for example, discussion of one videoed lesson led to a greater awareness among all science staff of the need to be strategically positioned to be aware of all students' reactions to presentations.

Assistant principals and other senior staff give additional support to new teachers, also ensuring that they have fewer teaching periods when first appointed. New teachers appreciate these opportunities to spend more time on familiarization of new procedures

and their own teaching approaches. School leaders have recognized the need for increased professional development in differentiation. A part-time member of staff has been appointed and is supporting staff on this endeavor. Coaches work well in cooperation with teachers, suggesting activities and modeling specific techniques.

Teachers, regarded by some parents as “truly dedicated”, provide strong support for students’ personal and academic development. Extensive support is also available for all students through regular discussions with their guidance counselor and the school provides related services when needed. The principal involves himself in the progress of a large number of students. Senior and other staff make concerted, continual efforts to ensure that the school runs smoothly and concentrates on learning. They are almost always successful in these efforts.

The school has a number of important and effective partnerships. Examples include the Gear-Up partnership with Lehman College in tutor and resource support for students. Building with Books provides opportunities for a small number of students to experience community service abroad. The local organization, SOBRO, offers experiences in local community service including leadership opportunities. Partnership with the organization South Bronx Churches remains strong and productive.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Teachers set interim goals for students in the form of encouragement to improve class assignments and homework in order to improve their grades in the next marking period assessment. In some cases, they set specific goals as next steps which relate to the development of certain skills. In a few instances, teachers are developing skills of analyzing students’ work to determine if there are barriers to learning for individuals or if students require greater challenge. Good examples were seen for the grade 12 writing class and for the students’ work which is the focus of the inquiry team. Overall, however, students’ learning paths are not routinely broken down into short-term measurable targets which help them focus clearly on next steps in learning and thus take on more responsibility for achieving improvement.

The various existing professional development activities relating to instructional techniques present an opportunity for teacher improvement. Assistant principals review progress on achieving overarching departmental goals along with teachers in each department. Evaluations are discussed in the school cabinet and a whole-school view is formed as to whether the school is on track to achieve its goals. As yet, interim measurable targets have not been introduced to promote more precise and focused discussion and inform subsequent planning to improve student and teacher outcomes.

There is a very clear school vision, shared by all in the school community. This vision was very well described by a grade 10 student who commented, “The school vision is for us to be leaders, not to follow but to be a role-model for others.”

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Bronx Leadership Academy High School	△	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?		X			
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?				X	
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?		X			
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?			X		
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?		X			
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped