



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Brooklyn Latin School**

**Public School 449**

**325 Bushwick Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11206**

**Principal: Jason K. Griffiths**

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**Reviewer: Chip Morrison**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Brooklyn Latin School is the newest of the City's specialized high schools. Founded in 2006 on the model of the Boston Latin School, the school currently serves 63 students in grade 9. The plan is to add an additional grade each year, growing to a population of approximately 500 students by the start of the academic year 2009-2010. Forty-two percent of current students are Black, 27% Hispanic, 11% White, 8% Asian, and 3% other. There are two special education students and one English language learner. Because only 40% of students are registered as Title I eligible, the school does not receive Title I funding. Average daily attendance is currently running at 95%, which is just slightly lower than attendance at other specialized high schools. Because the school is in its first year, data for "similar schools" are unavailable.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal is an especially knowledgeable and skillful instructional leader with a clear and carefully worked out plan for the future growth of the school.
- The principal has recruited a core group of highly-qualified young teachers who share his vision for academic rigor based on classical instructional models.
- The principal and faculty have together laid the groundwork to support a dynamic and growing professional learning community of reflective practitioners.
- Through an emphasis on discipline and positive behavior, adults in the school have successfully created a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning.
- Curriculum maps, instructional units, common rubrics, and interim assessments help guide instruction and tighten the relationship between teaching and learning.
- The principal has established a set of data-driven structures and processes for identifying and meeting the needs of students who require extra help.
- Individually, and as a group, teachers demonstrate solid content knowledge, engaging teaching practices, and the ability to work together in teams.
- The school has developed a range of effective mechanisms for communicating plans and expectations to parents and enjoys strong parent support.
- The school has benefited greatly from the assistance of outside organizations that have been instrumental in helping the school get off to a good start.

### What the school needs to improve

- As more data becomes available through the natural growth of the school, begin making comparisons across student subgroups, classrooms, and grade levels.
- Continue the development of formal systems for analyzing student writing, using the resulting data as an additional means of monitoring progress toward goals.
- Continue to refine the relationship between curriculum units, maps, rubrics, interim assessments, and instruction differentiated to meet the identified needs of students.
- Continue to explore ways of probing student understanding more deeply, such as through careful examination of written work, assessment data, and the use of Socratic questioning strategies.
- Extend formal opportunities for teachers to design, observe, and critique lessons together using existing rubrics, while using the same framework to gather quantitative data on schoolwide instructional practices.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The Brooklyn Latin School was established in 2006 on the model of the Boston Latin School, the oldest public high school in the United States. The founding principal, known as the Head Master, is an astute and well-trained instructional leader whose vision for a school based on classical educational principals is shared by a small but dedicated founding faculty and core group of parents. In just the first year, the principal and his teaching team, known as *magistri*, have established a solid set of foundational processes, structures and practices to guide the growth of the school in the years to come. These include a set of classical instructional models, including Socratic seminars and declamations, a data-driven student support system, and strategies and mechanisms for supporting ongoing professional learning.

Working closely with the principal, faculty members have also developed a set of curriculum maps in all subject areas, together with related instructional units, rubrics for assessing student work, and quarterly interim assessments that are aligned with State standards and help identify the extent to which teachers have helped students master these standards. Areas that have been identified for continuing improvement include better alignment of the curriculum maps, instructional units, rubrics and interim assessments, together with formal opportunities for teachers to design, observe, and critique lessons together.

### 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 student progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school has collected assessment data from the students' previous schools and this was used at the beginning of the year to identify students who would be likely to need additional academic support. Beyond this, because the school is in its first year of existence, very little data on student and school performance is available for analysis. Students have only just begun to sit for mandated State assessments, and the results of these are as yet unavailable.

The school has developed its own interim assessments in all subject areas. These are based on the same formats as the standardized tests students take. The assessments include both multiple-choice and open-ended items. Student answers to the multiple-choice items are scanned using the school's own optical scanner, and the results are compiled in spreadsheets, to which scores on the open-ended items are added manually. The reports are especially well designed, allowing teachers to see at a glance which items gave students the most difficulty and how students typically answered the questions they got wrong. This latter feature allows teachers to identify and address common misconceptions.

Although one teacher has modified the report to show patterns across skill clusters, the reports have not yet been developed in such a way that will allow teachers to track progress from one interim assessment to the next, nor has there been an attempt to

disaggregate the results in order to be able to separately track the progress of ethnic subgroups, English language learners, special education students, gender, or other categories that may be of interest.

Because the school is only in its first year with one grade level and one teacher for each subject, it is not yet possible to make useful comparisons with the performance and progress of similar schools, with the school's past performance, or across classrooms, grade levels and subject areas. As the school adds grades and starts to develop a track record of results, these comparisons will become possible and necessary.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

As a specialized high school, The Brooklyn Latin School sets and applies especially rigorous standards for academic performance. In the future, the plan is to admit only those students who have met or exceeded standards as measured by mandated State assessments. However, because the school got a late start in recruiting its first class, it has had to admit students who were not yet performing up to standard and had insufficient preparation in mathematics and English language arts. Still, teachers apply rigorous standards in their teaching and grading.

The school is developing a set of what it calls "walk-across-the-stage" goals. These describe what all students should know and be able to do when they walk across the stage to graduate. The school's curriculum maps identify the sequence for teaching concepts and skills during the course of the year and these are beginning to be linked to the walk-across-the-stage goals. The principal has worked closely with each teacher on these maps, with an emphasis on identifying "power standards" (cross-cutting skills and concepts) and essential questions. The interim assessments have been aligned with these goals, so there is a way of measuring progress toward them for individuals, classes, and the school as a whole. Rubrics for evaluating students' work are also used to clarify expectations for student writing across the curriculum.

The school pays especially close attention to ten students for whom the school's rigorous academic standards have posed the most serious challenge. These students receive a range of support, including one-on-one sessions in the afternoon with content-area tutors who have been hired for this purpose and with their own teachers during "office hours." The principal has also developed a data-driven, case-based system for identifying struggling students and devising strategies to help them overcome their academic difficulties.

Parents understand and embrace the school's high expectations for their children. The school has devised a range of channels for communicating expectations to parents, including parent-teacher conferences twice yearly that parents report are especially intensive and useful. E-mail is used widely as more than 80% of parents have e-mail addresses, and a web site is under development. As founding members of a new school community with an ambitious vision for its future, administrators, teachers, parents, and other partners are unusually goal-oriented. The school's plans for development, based on the Boston Latin School model, drive the efforts of the entire school community in a way that is well coordinated and invigorating.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

All first-year students are required to pursue a classical liberal arts curriculum consisting of Latin, Spanish, mathematics, physics, history, and English. With its coordinated systems of curriculum maps, rubrics, instructional units and interim assessments in all subject areas, the school has made significant progress in aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with rigorous academic standards. Although the principal and faculty have identified areas for further development, which they intend to address in working sessions this summer, a strong foundation has already been laid.

The interim assessments are a primary means of holding teachers accountable for helping students meet the goals identified in the curriculum maps. Teachers are responsible for analyzing the results of these assessments, compiling reports that identify patterns and lay out strategies for addressing identified weaknesses, either by re-teaching the entire class, or by providing remediation for individuals. These reports become the basis for one-on-one planning discussions between individual teachers and the principal.

During this first year, the principal has made effective use of the budget, schedule and human resources to meet current student needs, as revealed by assessment data, as well as to lay a firm foundation for future development. For example, he has hired outside tutors to work with the ten students most in need, while, with an eye to the future, investing heavily in professional learning and capacity-building activities. Similarly, the schedule provides for daily faculty office hours as well as almost daily faculty meetings with the principal (Head Master Lunches) that are used for planning as well as discussion of needs.

Lessons are at once rigorous and engaging. For example, in a physics class, students were building their own accelerometers which they were going to use to measure the forces they would be subjected to on different rides during an upcoming trip to an amusement park. In a first-year Latin class, students were observed enthusiastically demonstrating their developing grammatical knowledge by writing verb forms on the board, which they were justifying by citing sophisticated underlying rules.

A system has been established in which each student has an adult mentor. This, combined with the small size of the school, means that it is nearly impossible for student needs to go unnoticed, as statements from students and parents make clear. Attendance, averaging 95% daily, is not a serious problem, although the school has been struggling to deal with a handful of students whose repeated absences bring down the school average.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The principal has recruited a group of enthusiastic, well-educated young teachers who share his commitment to a vision for academic rigor based on classical instructional models. Teachers have been hired less for their ability to use data to drive instruction than for their academic preparation, demonstrated skill, willingness to learn and commitment to the school's mission to replicate the Boston Latin School model. Students themselves have been involved in selecting next year’s new teachers by observing and rating demonstration lessons.

The principal has established an especially strong internal program of professional learning. All teachers are expected to take part in summer retreats, seminars with outside experts and case studies on struggling students. They also attend lunches with the principal four times each week during which they discuss professional reading and issues such as consistent grading policies and progress toward goals. Professional development topics are selected more with a view to building capacity for future development than in response to particular trends in data at this early stage in the school's development.

The principal, an astute critic of lesson design and instructional strategies, is in classrooms every day. Teachers acknowledge that he is skillful in giving them positive and useful feedback. While the school has an extensive formal framework for analyzing instructional quality, this is not yet being used to generate data. Also, while teachers observe each other informally, there is a recognized need to formalize the process of collaborative design, observation, and critique of lessons.

The establishment and early growth of the school has been very much a team effort. As noted, teachers meet regularly with the principal to plan and evaluate results. The principal is widely respected. Teachers report he has strong opinions about the way the school should be run, but is willing to modify them in the face of reasoned debate. As the school's founding principal, he has built a solid foundation in line with the school's mission.

The school runs especially smoothly. Students all wear uniforms. They report feeling safe at the school, and appreciate the disciplined climate. The school has benefited from partnerships with outside organizations, notably from Replications, the non-profit company that has helped to fund the work of replicating the Boston Latin School model, and from New Leaders for New Schools, which has helped prepare the principal.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Even though the school is only in its first year of existence, systems for monitoring progress toward the interim goals specified in the curriculum maps are well established in all classrooms and all subject areas. The interim assessments, which are given four times each year, are aligned with the curriculum maps, allowing teachers to gauge the extent to which they have managed to help students meet the goals for progress to that point in the year. Teachers are expected to analyze the results and refine instructional plans accordingly. For example, if they see that a majority of students in the class are having difficulty with a specific skill or concept, it is re-taught. If only a small number of students are having difficulty, then these students are scheduled for individual tutoring. Teachers are required to document their analysis and revised plans, and discuss these with the principal. In this way, all teachers are held strictly accountable for monitoring the impact of their own teaching, and revising plans as necessary.

Based on its experience in this first year, the school has plans to further refine this system, striving for even better alignment between the assessments, curriculum maps, rubrics and State standards. The school has also applied for admission to the International Baccalaureate system of academic standards; if accepted, this will require further revision of the curriculum and systems for monitoring progress. Nevertheless, the existing systems supply a solid foundation for future growth and have the potential to play an important role in driving continuous improvement in teaching and learning in the years to come.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Brooklyn Latin School (PS 449)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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 student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.	X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X	

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and 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 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	