



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Bushwick School for Social Justice**

**High School 549  
400 Irving Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11237**

**Principal: Terry Byam**

**Dates of review: March 12 – 13, 2007**

**Reviewer: George Wallace**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Bushwick School for Social Justice has 432 students in grades 9 through 12. This year will be the first cohort of students to graduate since the school opened in September 2003, as a result of restructuring the former Bushwick School campus into four separate schools. The ethnic make up of students is: 67% Hispanic, 30% Black, 1% White, 1% Asian/Pacific, and 1% other. Thirteen percent of the student population are English language learners, and 13% are special education students. The school receives Title 1 funding with 86% of students eligible, a percentage that is above the average for similar and City schools.

Attendance at school was 89.2% in 2004, but although now slightly improving, school attendance has dropped dramatically and is now low at 83%. The school population is relatively stable and over the past four years has been growing and recruiting new staff.

As an empowerment school, Bushwick School for Social Justice has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development service, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork. This school currently uses the Institute for Student Achievement periodic assessments.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Teachers' expectations are high throughout the school.
- Parents, staff and students are highly supportive of their school and in particular value the strengths displayed by the school in developing students' personal and social education as well as their academic expertise.
- The school collects and uses a wide range of data effectively to understand what each student knows and to monitor progress over time.
- There is a very strong and highly valued care and well being program known as the advisory.
- The principal is well respected by parents, students and staff, and he together with an effective senior team has the capacity to ensure that the school improves.
- The administration uses data to identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance, and as a consequence has made scheduling decisions to aid student learning and professional development to improve teachers' skills.
- The school provides a comprehensive and effective professional development program for improved school and student outcomes.
- Teachers know they are accountable for students' learning and they are very successful in engaging students with their learning.
- There is a well developed curriculum that reflects the social justice theme throughout the school.
- Members of the administration know the students and staff very well; collaboration and teamwork are extremely strong.

### What the school needs to improve

- Sharpen action planning so that priorities are not only agreed for the whole school plan, but also for subject departments, showing strategies for improvement, timescales and success criteria and the resultant professional development program.
- Sharpen the administrative requirements for each grade and subject so that all staff know the rubrics for student achievement at different levels in their subject.
- Ensure that subject teachers know and work to their specific departmental action plan as well as the goals identified in the whole school action plan.
- There is an urgent need for the school attendance to be improved significantly.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with well developed features.**

Bushwick School for Social Justice is a school with many strengths. Most importantly it is a school that collects and uses data efficiently and effectively so that staff know and understand the strengths and weaknesses in knowledge of their students. This allows the school at various levels to modify the curriculum for the benefit of student learning. For example, specific programs of study are designed to capture students' interest and accelerate their learning, based on their prior achievements in reading and mathematics before entry to the school. In other circumstances teachers tailor work specifically to individual students' needs. In addition the school's advisory program is highly respected by staff, students and parents as an activity that effectively ensures that students have immediate support in their personal, social and academic lives. It is a caring school and is successful at working hard in the interests of its students. The core aims of the school indicate strong student engagement in the pursuit of high standards and, in doing so, students become knowledgeable and confident when facing local, national and global issues of the day.

Students are engaged in their lessons and, together with their parents, feel very comfortable in school. Parents receive frequent and informative feedback on the progress of their son or daughter; good quality feedback is also given to students. Collaboration and teamwork are strong. The school has a completed comprehensive education plan, but it is not an effective working document used for school improvement. However, the principal and senior staff know the areas that the school needs to develop. Accordingly they use the school budget wisely to support an intensive annual program of professional development. The school's approach to action planning is not sharp enough nor involves all staff. Monitoring of the curriculum, teaching and achievement are very effective across the school and data, for example in relation to lesson observations, is used in a positive way to bring about cross-school improvements. Attendance is low and is a high priority for the school. The principal is well respected, and he together with the team he has built, have a high capacity to ensure that the school continues to improve.

### 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 well developed.**

The school effectively gathers a wide range of useful data. It collects data from standardized tests, but also generates much internal data. The information acquired is available in statistical and graphical formats as well as soft data, such as information gathered from class walk throughs. The school demonstrates that there is understanding of such information at class and grade level as well as for individual students. Feedback, support and care for the academic progress of students is strong. Individual teachers, including those teaching subjects other than mathematics and English language arts,

analyze and use data to understand the levels at which students are operating and adjust their teaching. However, data is used inconsistently between different grades and departments.

The school knows the academic profile of its new students before they start high school, and, in addition, grade 9 students take benchmark tests in English and mathematics in September each year. This aids teachers' planning and, alongside other tests, the outcomes help to determine what additional special support is required. The school analyses the achievement levels of students by ethnicity but the use of such information varies across the school. Teachers also know the performance levels of students by gender and are working on raising boys' achievement. Special education student data, together with that for English language learners is also part of the school's analysis at interim, end of unit and end of year tests. The cohort of students being monitored through the Empowerment Schools Initiative is well known in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are currently exploring different strategies to move their relative success in class to one of securing examination success which is currently eluding them. The school is successful at measuring performance and progress through data. It recognizes, however, that continued vigilance and associated refinement to its work will continue to sharpen its data use.

**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.**

The school leaders use data to identify key issues for development, but bar the Comprehensive Education Plan there is no actual action plan being used as a working document known throughout the school. The main improvement strategy is through professional development, but few staff know the rationale for the priorities identified for development. The school holds a wide range of well-supported and valued in-house professional development activities throughout the year. The focus of such training is on developing teaching skills, identified from data and surveys, so that the impact can be felt through higher student performance. Plans made by teachers and other working groups across the school exist to satisfy the needs of individuals and groups of students. Specific student needs are discussed at subject and also at grade meetings. The two types of meeting complement each other since the context and focus of each, while different, are about improving the quality of student experiences and raising their achievements. A major example of effective use of data is the hiring of a writing specialist to support the work of the teachers and this is raising student achievement.

The school works well to ensure that students with specific needs are identified and attention given to meeting those needs. The advisory program is a highly valued and effective way to ensure that the needs of all students are recognized and acted upon. As an example of care in the community, the Bushwick campus provides a day care scheme for children of teenage mothers who wish to finish their school program. Students know that teachers care for them and expect them to concentrate, work and stay committed in order to succeed. Parents of these and other students also know this and value the high level of good quality information they receive from the school. They appreciate the fact that teacher consultation meetings are frequent, that they are mailed information and teachers frequently telephone to talk about their son or daughter's progress. Such calls

may reveal concerns, but are also made to convey highly positive messages about achievement. Plans for improving student performance and progress drive the developments of the school. Therefore staff, students, parents and other partners are strongly aware of the mission and success of the school in raising achievement and in promoting an understanding of social justice at local, national and international scales.

**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 well developed.**

The school curriculum is well developed and based upon the requirements of the Regents program. However, there is, as the name of the school suggests, a strong bias towards a curriculum that in every respect reflects social justice. Therefore, social justice themes are presented in all subjects, where possible. The school has an elected school government that deals with a wide variety of issues about the school, including the curriculum, local and global issues. The advisory program is one that supports students’ personal, social and academic development with all teachers mentoring about 16 students. They meet daily for one to one sessions and group discussions on a wide variety of social and citizenship issues, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and tolerance.

Teachers are acutely aware of the fact that they are accountable for the effectiveness of students’ learning. As a consequence they are keen to ensure they know their students well, analyze data and plan lessons accordingly. In some instances, specific weaknesses, such as in literacy, especially in grades 9 and 10, have become a whole school issue where teachers plan to develop literacy wherever possible, including in physical education classes. These, together with the hiring of a specialist teacher of writing, are examples of the budget being effectively used to support students’ achievement. Staff recruitment, training and development are also driven by student needs. Equally, scheduling decisions are well guided by knowledge of students’ progress, for example the advisory program. However, in a small high school there are understandable constraints on some aspects of scheduling, for example through negotiation with the other schools on the same campus, and through differentiated teaching.

Teachers know their students well. Students, parents and lesson observations indicate that teaching engages students’ learning. There is strong mutual respect between students and staff. Students know that this school works hard in their interests. They also know that if they have a concern they have open access to staff to discuss their anxiety. Student attendance is lower than the school goal. However, the school has good strategies which are refined and employed to raise attendance.

**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 well developed.**

The staff hiring process is thorough and rigorous. Being a school that is highly active in the field of social justice, students and parents are fully engaged in the hiring process. All work to satisfy themselves that the best candidate not only has high expectations but, in a climate of high student support, they also need to be able to ‘go the extra mile’. As an

appointee, the induction program is good, as is the subsequent professional development program. The level of collaboration and team work throughout the school is high. Staff frequently attend professional development sessions which are arranged as retreats and occur up to eight times a year on weekends and at times when the school is closed. School leaders have taken the opportunity to develop their professional learning program as a consequence of their Empowerment status. It is an effective and valued program.

The principal and assistant principals frequently observe lessons. Prior to such visits they agree particular foci so they can share their findings and present the strengths and weaknesses to staff. Teachers also have the opportunity to observe others, as well as watching coaches demonstrate lessons. In addition, teachers at grade meetings usefully discuss specific students and groups of students as well as which strategies work or need to be redesigned. Planning, evaluation of outcomes and revision of plans take place in subject and grade teams. Both are effective, however, the subject program lacks a specific action plan aligned to the school plan, and a lack of agreed rubrics showing levels of achievement by subject for each grade. The school leaders attend specific grade and department meetings to monitor and share findings. Such information is used in school time to praise and develop individuals, while bigger issues are logged for later professional development activities. The principal is widely respected. He knows his school well and is very strong at setting the right tone and a positive learning environment. He and his senior team have a strong capacity to effect change and continue to make improvements. Procedures are clear to all and the school runs smoothly. The school is highly effective in aligning external support and activities to the school's academic goals.

**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.**

The school knows its priorities for development and the professional development program is aligned to these. However, there are no specific, measurable time related goals together with agreed strategies to achieve such goals. In addition there is no consistent approach to medium and long term planning in departments where goals are subject specific as well as being aligned to the school goals. While the school work on its priorities are understood and its plan is gradually being implemented the lack of a systematic approach diminishes the school's ability to determine the quality of success on each goal.

Data use is well developed, and as such there are comparisons of student progress within and across departments. Grade meetings in particular discuss successes and barriers in student achievement. Both outcomes are used to assess the immediate and sometimes longer term next steps to improve the work of the failing students in particular. Information generated by periodic assessments is used immediately to modify teachers' individual plans, which are invariably to ensure success in their specific subject. However, a whole school example of this was identifying weaknesses in students' quality of writing. As such the principal agreed to hire an effective specialist to improve writing. The program is working. The interim findings from many sources of data drive the way in which the school revises and sets its priorities. A key feature of the senior team is their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, resulting in flexible responses to improve student achievement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Bushwick School for Social Justice (HS 549)</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	