

**Bard Early College High School**

**Bard Early College High School**

**High School 696**

**525 East Houston Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Ray Peterson**

**Dates of review: April 7 – 11, 2006**

**Reviewer: Brian Oppenheim  
Cambridge Education**

# **Bard Early College High School**

## **Content Of The Report**

### **Part 1: The School Context**

Background information about the school

### **Part 2: Overview**

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve – immediate action

Opportunities for further improvement – medium to long term

### **Part 3: Main Findings**

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

### **Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary**

# **Bard Early College High School**

## **Part 1: The School Context**

### **Information about the school**

Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) is a partnership between the New York City Department of Education and Bard College. It was created in 2001 as an alternative to the traditional high school to enable highly motivated students to move in four years from ninth grade through the first two years of college, earning the associate of arts (A.A.) degree as well as a high school diploma. There are 509 students in Grades 9 and 10 and in Early College years I and II. Of these 265 are in grades 9 and 10. 117 students are eligible for free state lunches. Twelve students have special educational needs. Students come from the range of ethnic backgrounds.

# Bard Early College High School

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Most students achieve high standards in their studies and gain associate degrees. As a result a high proportion gains entry to good colleges.
- The very strong expectation that all students will be engaged in college level study ensures that all experience a high level of instruction.
- Students are very positive about the school. They are especially appreciative of the range of interesting courses.
- The tutoring program is successful for many students who find the one on one support particularly helpful.
- Teaching is characterized by expert subject knowledge, the development of good writing skills, good opportunities for discussion and strong relationships focused on learning.
- The great majority of students are interested and engaged. Students respond very well to having their thinking challenged and extended.
- Small classes are effective in supporting the school's mission of developing critical thinking through seminar work.
- Leadership is reflective: the strong commitment to improvement means that staff are looking continually to improve what the school provides.
- Parents are very supportive of the school, the quality of the academic provision and the support students receive from their teachers.
- Academic partners extend the range of student experiences well.

### WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- As part of self-evaluation develop a process for reviewing teaching effectiveness in terms of its impact on students' learning experiences. This is particularly relevant in the ninth and tenth grades where the school has identified that there are inconsistencies in teaching quality and where a number of students do not go onto the early college program.
- Use the data currently available more systematically to identify patterns of performance and identify where improvement is needed most: where practicable, collect additional data that supports the self-evaluation process.
- Identify a manageable improvement project based on the considerable range of evidence and knowledge already available. "Start now but be pragmatic".
- Use the above actions to develop a systematic and sustainable approach to self-evaluation to help identify and build strategies for implementation and improvement:
  - what is working well and can be built upon;
  - where there are areas for development;
  - the success of initiatives;
  - the accuracy of the wide range of anecdotal evidence;
- the actions needed to make improvements and/or maintain excellence.

### Part 3: Main Findings

#### Overall Evaluation

**This is a well-developed school overall, with some areas for further development**

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

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

**This aspect of the schools work is proficient.**

The school uses the range of available data proficiently to help identify those students who are not achieving as well as they should. In many ways the monitoring of performance and progress is well developed: teachers use a variety of assessment tools to determine students' progress and their achievements. In science these include tests, homework and projects that are assessed from an agreed rubric. Similarly, in social science, for example, checks on students' progress are achieved through regular and frequent homework, which is set nearly every day, and tests. As a result, teachers have a good understanding of individual students' performance and whether they are making sufficient progress.

The school's admissions process means that it has a significant amount of data about freshmen's skills, understanding and performance, particularly in mathematics and writing where the school sets its own assessments. The use of academic records, teacher recommendations and interviews enhances the assessment process and freshmen typically have a minimum grade average of 85. As a result, the school has a good range of comparative data and information for all students, some of which is standards based.

Similarly, the school uses the information it collects about students' performance well. For example, it has identified gender differences in achievement and knows that African-American students are most likely to struggle with their studies. But it recognizes that this is through discussions with and between teachers and students rather than the analysis of "hard" data. Thus, the school has identified differences in performance and achievement amongst different groups of students and across different subjects but does not yet use data systematically to identify areas for improvement, particularly in relation to teaching and learning.

A particularly significant initiative is the work by teachers in the science and mathematics departments to develop comprehensive, evidence-based data designed to check students' progress and identify performance. By using and analyzing a wide range of secure data, the program hopes to provide comparisons and predictions of students' performance and thus whether the school is serving all its students as well as it should. This work has great potential, particularly for identifying to impact of teaching on learning.

## Bard Early College High School

**Quality Statement 2: 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 aspect of the schools work is well developed.**

There is, without doubt, an ethos of high expectation, which is conveyed well to all stakeholders. Parents, for example, express strong support for the school, its academic excellence and high expectations.

School leaders have a well-developed understanding of students' performance and progress. Much of this understanding comes from teachers' knowledge of their students and the information gained from the admission process: for example, teachers are able to evaluate accurately how well a student is prepared for the early college program. In doing so, they make judgments about students' enthusiasm and engagement in class or their writing and study skills. Test scores, student attendance figures and the number of assignments that are turned in on time are also used as indicators that a student may be struggling with his/her studies.

Overall there are some well-developed intervention strategies. Students who are identified as under-performing are placed on academic probation. Collaboration with parents is well-developed: teacher - parent conferences and one on one meetings both play their part and ensure that the school is able to identify the causes of the under-performance and set the a range of strategies to support improvement. As well as an assigned counselor, interventions include mandatory small group tutoring sessions and one to one meetings to check progress. The writing and mathematics centers also play a central part in supporting the learning of those needing extra help and encouragement. All these strategies clearly have a positive impact for many students: more than 70 may be on academic probation but at least two thirds of this group move onto the early college program. However, teachers do not routinely make clear the next steps in their learning. Report cards for example, show that teachers know their students well but narratives do not always identify targets to which students should aim. The school's processes are generally proficient and ensure that students do not slip through the net but some still do not progress onto the early college program.

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

**This aspect of the schools work is well developed.**

A number of changes have been made to the curriculum, particularly in the ninth and tenth grades, to meet better the needs of students. In science, for example, the program is being re-designed to provide improved learning experiences such as small group instruction. Teachers have also identified technical writing as one of the main weaknesses and the new program is partly designed to address this area. The program in foreign languages is also undergoing some development work in order to align it more closely to the needs and skills of students. Here, a basic preparation course is to be taught in the first semester of next year following a review of last year's program.

## Bard Early College High School

English teachers have also identified writing as a weakness. This issue is addressed through the five-day writing workshop with which each student begins the academic year. The writing center is also a central strategy to improve performance and progress: here, students work diligently and with close support from the teacher in charge. Peer review is also used as strategy in English to raise standards and achievement.

It is too early to say whether these developments are having an impact: on students' progress: a self-evaluation program to monitor and review outcomes will help the school to know if the action it is taking is making a difference to students' performance.

The use a full time faculty member to staff the center shows that decisions about staffing are based on the identification of need. The school has a program of classroom observation and has identified that pedagogy is not fully effective in some areas. It recognizes that this can lead to some disengagement particularly where students do not have the skills to deal effectively with independent learning and critical thinking. Leaders acknowledge that there needs to be a greater emphasis on classroom observation and discussing these with teachers.

Most students are very positive about the school. They are especially appreciative of the range of interesting courses and the opportunity to develop their critical thinking.

**Quality Statement 4: 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 aspect of the schools work is well developed**

As with decisions about staff deployment, staff selection is allied closely to the school's mission, its partnership with Bard College and the resulting high expectations. There is a great deal of informal discussion amongst teachers which enables them to share their knowledge about students and work together to develop and revise plans to better meet the needs of all students. The work in science to revise the integrated science program and the basic preparation course in foreign languages are both good examples of effective collaboration.

There is little doubt that leaders, faculty and staff are reflective practitioners and are focused on maximizing students' performance and progress. Much of this is based on their positive relationships with students, the good opportunities for sharing information informally and the fact that small class sizes make it possible for teachers to know their students well. As a result everyone shares the same goals and works together well. However, this informality means that self-evaluation is relatively underdeveloped, particularly in relation to monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions on students' performance and progress.

Part of the reason for this is that the school is still relatively new. Much of the data covers just three or four years and thus lacks the integrity for detailed analysis. For example, the school has carried out studies of its graduates, designed to identify "trends and successes", which concludes rightly that with only two graduation classes it is too early to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, the study raises some important issues and shows that the school is serious about driving forward improvement. As the study notes, the opportunity to analyze and discuss its results can help to drive future

## Bard Early College High School

decisions. With this study the school has the basis of a well-developed self-evaluation process. However, it needs further development, especially in the use and analysis of data to identify patterns of performance and identify where improvement is needed most.

**Quality Statement 5: 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 aspect of the schools work is proficient.**

As the evidence above shows, the school has some well-developed structures for evaluating students' progress and identifying weaknesses. Some important work is being carried out to revise plans so that the school can better meet the needs of all its students. Much of this work tends to be informal, based on teachers' good knowledge of their students and teacher discussion. Although the school was relatively new this was an appropriate method for identifying where improvement is needed. However, the school is now getting to the point where data can provide a greater insight into trends and patterns of performance: the use and analysis of this data will provide the school with a sound basis for establishing a self-evaluation process. In addition, the range of evaluation strategies remains somewhat limited, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, and needs to be extended.

The re-design of some of the teaching programs has the potential to improve the learning experiences of students and thus drive their progress. These need to be monitored and evaluated carefully in relation to their impact on improved performance and progress.

# Bard Early College High School

## Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

<b>Quality Statement 1: Monitoring Performance and Progress: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data</b>	o	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated picture of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are: (1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects		X	
1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school		X	
1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
<b>Quality Statement 2: Academic Improvement Goals and Plans</b>	o	✓	+
2.1 Using data, the school sets demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops 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 warranting attention.		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. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably 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>Quality Statement 3: Instructional Programs, Practices, &amp; Arrangements; Student Engagement</b>	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and based on the curriculum's capacity to generate useful interim data about progress towards goals.			X
3.2 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	
3.2 Scheduling decisions are driven by the time and resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the time and resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the resources needed to obtain and use performance and progress data, set high goals, and implement and continuously improve the school's plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.5 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
3.6 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.7 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.8 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies exist and are routinely utilized for the purpose of achieving stated academic goals.			X

## Bard Early College High School

<b>Quality Statement 4: Staff Selection, Leadership, &amp; Capacity Building</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</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.			<b>X</b>
4.2 The leadership team is respected and has capacity to effect change.			<b>X</b>
4.3 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and they are generally followed.			<b>X</b>
4.4 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			<b>X</b>
4.5 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.		<b>X</b>	
4.6 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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 5: Recognition, Intervention, &amp; Adjustments</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</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 reaching stated goals.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
5.3 Information generated by interim 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.			<b>X</b>
5.4 Each plan's final outcome, and the aggregate and comparative outcomes of similar plans, drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, including the revision of plans designed to be implemented again.		<b>X</b>	