



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Bronx High School for Writing
and Communication Arts
High School 253**

**800 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Steven Chernigoff

**Dates of review: October 24 – 25, 2006
Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts was established in 2004 and is devoted to writing and communication arts. The school is located on the Evander Child campus with six other specialist high schools. The school has its own teaching area and use of shared facilities on the campus, including, for example, the student cafeteria.

In 2004/5 the school opened with grade 9 students; these students have since been joined by two further student cohorts, bringing total enrollment to 341 students. These are drawn from the neighborhood around the school and others from across the region. Seventy percent of the students are female, which is higher than similar schools and the City average. Approximately 50% of students are Hispanic, 46% are Black and 2% are White. Seventy-five percent of students have Title 1 eligibility, which is higher than the City average.

Attendance was 82.9% in the school's first year, although effective strategies raised attendance to 84% in 2005/6 and, in the current year, the rate is 87%. Strategies also address late arrival at school.

The school provides opportunities for learning beyond the school day. These include after-school activities, residential visits, Saturday Academy, and summer school. As a result, students have opportunities to consolidate previous learning, to extend work from classes and to prepare for examinations or re-examinations.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal makes effective plans for successive growth each year, as the school moves from a single cohort to providing all four grades.
- Effective measures are in place to raise attendance and reduce late ness.
- Students are eager to learn and are well-behaved in school.
- A wide range of assessments is used to supplement grades from formal testing.
- The data obtained from regular assessments is used well by teachers to inform intervention strategies for students.
- The school has positive and proactive relationship with parents.
- Respectful and caring relationships have been created between staff and students.
- Effective classes are provided beyond the school day to extend learning.
- The principal observes teaching thoroughly and makes secure judgments on the quality of instruction.
- A good range of partnerships support students and enhance their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Take better opportunities to compare its performance with other similar schools.
- Give greater emphasis to the analysis of test results and samples of student work in grade conferences so that the needs of students are more effectively met.
- Further develop the analytical skills of the teachers so that they can interpret assessment data more effectively.
- Ensure that teachers reprise learning objectives at the end of lessons to check that the students have understood the activity and have a better understanding of their own learning.
- Further develop differentiated teaching so that work is more effectively matched to the needs of individual students.
- Be more proactive in intervention strategies rather than reacting when things do not work out.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

In 2003 the principal was appointed to found the school, which opened with its first cohort of grade 9 students in 2004. Since then he has established a popular school where academic outcomes have been raised, and the attendance and behavior of the students have been significantly improved. Although writing and communication arts are the focus for the school, students follow a broad curriculum and other curriculum areas serve to reinforce and apply writing and communication skills.

The school maximizes the use of its defined campus area and teaching time; classes are scheduled with minimal transition time to ensure that teaching time is used effectively. Parents are pleased with the progress made by their children and the supportive relationships that staff establish and maintain with students. There are valuable links with various other organizations to support attendance, provide student guidance and enhance the curriculum.

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 uses a range of assessments to measure student progress and compares its performance with other high schools in the locality. Effective systems for tracking student progress are in place and this information is used to measure the progress of all students, whatever their ethnicity or level of need. There is now detailed data available to track the progress of the current grade 10 and 11 students. This data shows, for example, that 80% of students now pass grade tests at the first attempt.

The principal and the administration are working hard to help teaching staff to review and interpret the data which is available to them and to make sure they understand all of the implications. Test outcomes are analyzed at six-weekly intervals, and this data is used to track individual and class progress. Baseline assessments are carried out for grade 9 students with identified special needs on entry to the school. Where special needs are identified after entry to the school, the special education teacher carries out assessments that are used to inform intervention strategies. Using this information, intervention strategies are matched to the particular needs of each student, whether they are provided by a resource room teacher, in class teaching or within small groups.

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.

There is an effective system for teachers to work collaboratively to set goals for students. Given that, the principal recognizes that with the school increasing in size, there is a need to make some of the informal collaborative processes more formal to ensure consistency and to ensure the effective sharing of information with larger teams of staff.

Special education students have detailed individual educational plans which provide clear goals for improvement and identify the support strategies that will be used to move their learning forward.

Students are clear about their academic and attendance targets and value the ways teachers and support staff help them to make progress. Parents and students are made aware of the expectations for the performance of the students through the targets set for them. The school is highly regarded by parents who particularly appreciate the way in which detailed information about their child’s educational program and their progress is shared at regular intervals throughout the year.

Working partnerships with other professionals and support agencies have a clear focus on improving learning outcomes. The school has recruited counseling and guidance staff to provide on-site support for students and the service they provide is greatly appreciated by students and their parents. Students are active partners in decision-making, through the Town Hall forum and school council meetings. These student bodies have recently considered a range of matters including ways in which the campus canteen could be used more effectively. They have also discussed the improvements that might result if the library was changed from a meeting place to a resource center.

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.

Many students chose the school to take advantage of the explicit focus on writing and communication arts. Students and staff are given many good opportunities to demonstrate their writing skills during lessons and non-teaching time and work of a high standard is displayed in classrooms and shared areas. This serves to generate great interest and to develop student self-esteem as they see that their work is valued and appreciated by others.

Teachers in all subject areas encourage students to communicate clearly through spoken and written language. Students are co-operative learners and most are engaged by the content of their lessons. They generally have very positive relationships with staff members and teaching and pastoral staff are seen by most students as being caring and trusted friends whose opinions are to be respected. Most students are articulate and express their views confidently. They are also willing to question, to debate and to make suggestions. Students are thoughtful and show respect for the views of others.

The principal monitors the work of the school carefully and has identified several areas that require further development. He recognizes the need to further develop the use of assessment data by instructional staff so that the work set is better matched to the needs of individual students. He is also aware that teachers do not always review the objectives at the end of lessons to make sure that students have understood the issue being studied or achieved what was intended.

The principal is eager to appoint a music teacher to ensure that a music curriculum is further enhanced. The administration team schedules classes carefully to ensure that all resources are used effectively to optimize the quality of instruction.

Attendance rates, although below those found in many similar schools, are rising steadily because of the rigorous work being done by the school to make stronger links with parents and students. Lateness is also being tackled effectively, but some lateness is the result of the time taken for students to pass through the campus security screening.

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 cohesive staff team works closely together, shares information and is committed to helping every student to learn and achieve. The principal shares student data with teachers in planning meetings and supports them in the understanding the data. He has appointed a dedicated and enthusiastic leadership team who are committed to the school's mission and willingly share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the students. New teachers are given effective support by more experienced colleagues and the principal.

Planning is completed accurately and aims at to continue the improvement in achievement at a time when the school is still continuing its expansion to include an additional cohort. High value is placed on professional development, which is provided internally by the principal, the assistant principal and through staff developers. The principal agrees individual development needs with each member of staff. This enables them to better differentiate the learning they provide for their students. Feedback from lesson observations informs professional development needs and all parties are sure that this is having a positive impact on the quality of instructional teaching.

Counselors and guidance staff are effective and respected members of the staff team. The school recognized the need to have full-time staff in these positions so that student issues and concerns are dealt with promptly. This seamless approach is valued by both students and parents and means that issues are addressed when they emerge.

A range of working partnerships has been established to enhance the curriculum and increase student learning outcomes. Links with publishing houses and visiting artists give students good opportunities to relate their academic learning to practical, real life applications of writing and communication arts. The Epic Theater Center team works closely with the school throughout the year and makes a very positive contribution to the school's curriculum.

The principal is seen by staff, students and parents as addressing issues and being supportive of the staff. The school is seen as running smoothly, with a reduced number of disruptive incidents due to the process for peer mediation that has been established.

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 makes good use of the results of State and City tests and internal assessments to analyze progress between different classes within the school. This information is used to identify changes that are required in the curriculum, to inform future teaching and intervention strategies and to devise interim and short-term goals to ensure that students are working to their potential.

Flexibility and adapting to change as it grows are strengths of the school. An example of adapting to change is the management of the campus library, which is currently under-resourced and under-utilized. The principal has recognized the need to create a well-resourced research and library facility on the site and is now setting about this task with real purpose.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts (HS 253)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	
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.	∅	✓	+
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"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		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"> ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 		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"> all other categories of interest to the school* 		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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		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.

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.	∅	✓	+
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

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.	Ø	✓	+
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
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
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.	Ø	✓	+
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
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.	Ø	✓	+
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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	