

The Bronx Laboratory School

**The Bronx Laboratory School
800 East Gun Hill Road (4th Floor)
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Marc Sternberg

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

The Bronx Lab School opened in September 2004 and presently caters for 215 students in 9th and 10th grades. The school will continue to grow by approximately 100 students for the next two years and once its development is complete, will provide for up to 400 students from Grades 9 through to 12. The local area is very mixed, but there are significant pockets of social and economic deprivation and over 95% of students are eligible for free school meals. Achievement on entry to the school is generally low and well over two thirds of students start at the school with Levels 1 and 2 in Mathematics and English language arts. Therefore, significantly below the expected level of proficiency. In addition approximately 25% of students receive additional support either for special educational needs or for English Language.

The school is learning to live with disruption and physical change and moved its operation from floor 2 to floor 4 at the end of its first year. This summer will expand its activity to include the entire fourth floor and part of the third floor. The school is part of and receives support from the Autonomous Zone.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- It has high expectations of students and encourages them to think positively and to succeed. As a result, students are achieving well and are exceeding the performance targets set by the Autonomy Zone.
- Students are given many valuable opportunities to consider important issues and to take responsibility for their own actions. As a result, they have very high levels of self-belief and demonstrate well-developed levels of social and political maturity.
- At 93%, attendance is being maintained at a much higher level than in most other high schools in New York City (NYC).
- Staff and students generally get along very well together and display respectful relationships. As a result behavior is well-developed and any conflicts are quickly resolved through counseling and peer intervention.
- The principal and vice-principal have complimentary skills and work together well as a proficient team. They have a clear vision for the school and are both aware that the decisions they now have to make will have a critical impact on the school's future success.
- The school has well-developed and effective systems for recording and analyzing the performance data gathered for each student.
- Instructional staff are given very good opportunities to develop professional skills, which are presently at least proficient. They are a dedicated team and are working hard in their faculty teams to develop new and imaginative curricular courses for next year.
- Resources are used imaginatively, by the school, to provide numerous educational visits; including a planned trip to China for 12 Grade 10 students. These visits are open to those students that work hard and achieve well. These opportunities motivate students and make a significant impact on their personal and academic achievement.
- The school works hard to overcome the physical limitations of the building, classroom space and the facilities available.

WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO IMPROVE

- Greater emphasis must now be given by the administration to reviewing and supporting the quality of instruction. Strategies such as sharing best practice would be valuable in raising student achievement and aiding the further development of staff.
- Develop and implement consistently an agreed management framework that will support the continued growth of the school. This should include the delegation of certain management responsibilities, give better levels of communication and enable the seamless induction of new staff and students into the organization and culture of the school.
- Provide students with better opportunities to influence the decisions made by the school and to contribute more to its development.
- Develop and secure systems to ensure that all staff are familiar with the well-developed systems that already exist for recording and analyzing the performance data of students.
- Improve the use made of the performance data, by teachers, to enhance planning; ensuring that the work set is more closely matched to the needs of individual students.
- Analyze and grade the work produced by students and produce portfolios of

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moderated work for each instructional area so that all staff have a clearer understanding of the expected standard for each grade.

- Expand the classroom space and facilities available to accommodate the Grade 11 students in the fall of 2006.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

Overall this is a very proficient school, which has many well-developed features.

The Bronx Lab School has achieved well in the short time it has been in existence and has quickly established itself as one of the most well-developed of the new schools created in New York in the past 2 years. The school now finds itself at a critical stage in its development and the decisions made in the next three months will have a very significant impact on its long-term future.

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.

The school is well-developed in these areas

The co-founders of the Bronx Laboratory School, Marc Sternberg and Michelle Brochu established this school with the ambitious mission 'to provide a superior high school experience to everyone by maintaining extraordinarily high standards for student work and instruction.' The first steps down that road have been highly successful and the two founders, as co-directors, are well on track to achieve their goals.

The use of data is very well-developed, generally, and the principal makes very good use of a powerful data management system called Salesforce to record and interrogate a range of data on each student as they move through the school. In this way a careful watch can be maintained on the progress of each class, each grade level and each group of students according to their age, gender or ethnicity and staff can make adjustments to the instructional programs as required. Most staff use this data proficiently well to inform instructional planning but a few are still rather reluctant to use computer-based systems in this way. The data gathered using Salesforce can be filtered according to a wide range of criteria, and in addition to their academic progress, the school records and monitors attendance data, professional development data and the elective courses each student completes, for example.

The performance of students in this school is compared regularly with the performance of other schools in the Autonomous Zone and progress at the Bronx Lab exceeds the levels achieved by many of those that are at a comparable stage in their development. Course pass rates are above 80% and Regents pass rates are above 85%. Application is very high and there is a genuine will in many students to achieve high standards which are reflected in the much of the work seen. Notable examples include the quality of art work on display in corridors and classrooms, the great care taken to produce beautiful books in an elective class and the very high standard attained by the choir formed to raise money for charity.

In addition to the data collected through formal assessments the school also collects much of its data by more informal means, often through discussion with students. When all this data is taken together instructional staff have a very clear knowledge of each student as well as the progress he/she is making. They can then use this to plan programs that meet particular needs. Instructional staff grade work carefully, often with

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the students so that feedback can be given directly about the strengths of their work and areas where they need to improve.

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.

The school is generally well-developed in these areas

The quality of instruction is generally well-developed, mainly because most teachers have good skills and pay careful attention to available assessment data before planning interesting and carefully considered classes that are well matched to the individual needs of students, including special education students. A group of staff, The 'SAM Leadership Group' makes effective use of the data available on the Salesforce data portal to focus attention on the school's most vulnerable students, to good effect. The school provides a comprehensive program of additional after school revision sessions to help students prepare for their Regents Examinations. These are well supported and have been successful in preparing students for formal tests in core studies.

The school shares its high expectations with students and their parents. Every student is given frequent reminders of the significance of high academic success and the importance of going on to college. Regular meetings of the staff teams within the school are used to discuss the performance of individual students and to ensure that the curriculum is meeting all of their needs.

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

The school is well-developed in these areas.

The school has well-developed systems for encouraging students to attend school on a regular basis and, as a result, attendance rates are currently running at approximately 93%, which comfortably exceeds the limits set by the Autonomous Zone. Instructional programs are very carefully designed to be accessible to the students and to fire their enthusiasm for work. In addition to the classes planned in the usual range of academic subjects, the school has a comprehensive program of elective courses that include typing skills classes, drama and book making. These are very popular with students. Advisory sessions are very carefully planned and deal with a wide range of areas related to the personal and social development of the students. The school also provides its students with many fascinating opportunities to complete internships.

The school organizes a comprehensive series of extra-curricular activities and visits, often involving student participation in charitable ventures. In a recent public service week, the students were involved in a range of activities both near home and much further abroad. One group, for example worked repairing properties in New Orleans that had been extensively damaged by the floods associated with hurricane Katrina. These activities do much to make learning meaningful to the students and to help them to achieve high levels of political and social awareness. Involvement in these very popular activities is dependent on full attendance and high levels of achievement and this structure of incentives is very effective. One group of 12 students will take part in a planned visit to China this summer, at the same time another group were working hard to ensure their involvement in an outdoor education summer school.

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Students are also highly engaged in their studies and explain, when interviewed, that they wish to attend the school regularly because of the quality of the relationships they have with their teachers and with each other and the range of interesting activities they are asked to work on. They have very secure relationships with all of the adults in the staff and report that they would share concerns or confidences with any member of staff if the need arose. Behavior is very well-developed and suspensions from the school are exceedingly rare, mainly because of the very effective use of peer moderation to resolve any disputes that arise. A very rare outburst resulted in both parties sitting down with a peer moderator who was supervised and assisted by the social worker.

In addition to the careful analysis of the available data by the principal, which clearly shows the relative success of the various instruction programs, the assistant principal is very active in her monitoring of the quality of the curriculum both by analyzing plans and by observing classes. Both senior managers are therefore well informed about the strengths and the relative weaknesses that presently exist in the curriculum and are looking to increase the range of subjects that are available as the school grows. The school has well-developed links with a range of community-based organizations.

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.

The school is generally proficient in these areas.

Together with his assistant principal, the principal has a well-developed vision for the school and they are both exemplary role models to staff and to students. Whilst they have a very clear vision of where they want to get to in terms of the school's development, and have achieved great success so far by doing what seemed right, they are now at the stage where the school will require a formal management structure if it is to effectively promote the learning and professional needs of approximately 300 students and 20 staff members. Current communication systems work proficiently, but there will need to be a higher level of organization when larger numbers of people are involved. The school has also reached a stage in its development when the principal will need to delegate some of his existing work load to several of the capable young professionals on the staff. This will ensure that more time is available for him to discuss strategic matters with his assistant principal and to have a greater impact on the quality of instruction.

The principal analyzes data rigorously and uses the information gained effectively to compare outcomes within and across classrooms, as well as to develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress. His detailed knowledge of the effectiveness of instructional staff has served him well when vital decisions needed to be made about which staff should be retained and which will not be returning after the summer break. Leaders and faculty staff are given good opportunities to evaluate their own performance and that of their department by sharing planning and comparing outcomes in other classes. Faculty teams plan very rigorously and there is a very high standard of debate in the frequent meetings held to formulate curriculum programs for next year.

There are well-developed procedures to identify the training needs of both the school and individual staff and instructional staff have regular opportunities to develop their skills by attending professional development courses. The principal makes good use of the funds available from the Autonomous Zone to provide planning time either in weekly meetings or in regular retreats. The co-founders now both identify the need for them to meet together to formulate the next stage of their development plan.

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

The School is well developed in these areas.

Curriculum plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are delivering the required results. Adjustments, if required, are made quickly so that students waste as little learning time as possible. The Salesforce information management program provides much valuable data in this regard and enables the management team to make minor adjustments to even those programs, which are working effectively, this is part of the continuous cycle of improvement which lies at the heart of the school. The school is aware that it could further develop its already proficient work in this area by developing portfolios of moderated work for each faculty so that work is even more accurately matched to the needs of students.

Other key observations

The principal manages the accommodation well and has well-developed plans to manage the schools expansion into adjacent classrooms as the school continues its planned growth.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Summary Grades

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

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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.	0	✓	+
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 The leadership team is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.3 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and they are generally followed.		X	
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.		X	
4.5 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
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.			X
Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.	0	✓	+
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.			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 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.			X
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.			X