



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists

**Middle School 269
1180 Tinton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: David J Vázquez

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Reviewer: Marilyn Lehmann

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists presently has 190 students from grade 6 through 8. The majority of students, about 70%, are Hispanic, while about 29% are Black and just over 1% are Asian or other. About 7% of the students are English language learners and just below 7% are special education students. Eighty-five percent of the students are Title 1 eligible. Attendance rates, at a little above 90%, are below those of similar and City schools.

The school, which was established in 2004, currently uses one floor of a building which also accommodates PS 198. It is expected that the school will return to a new building on its original site in 2009, when it is planned to grow into a grade 6 through 12 high school.

The Bronx Studio School is an Empowerment School. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal leads by example, motivating staff and students and setting a clear vision and direction for the work of the school.
- The principal and administration work tirelessly to provide different opportunities, along with the necessary support, for staff and students to experience and enjoy success.
- A strong spirit of collaboration pervades the work of the school, and members of staff are deeply committed to working closely and honestly with one another to ensure the success of every student.
- In this small school every student is known personally to members of staff and students feel safe and secure.
- The strong advisory structure makes sure that every student knows at least one adult in the school who cares about them and in whom they can confide.
- Very high expectations are explicit throughout the school and are conveyed to, and shared by staff, students and parents.
- Students are encouraged and supported to become independent scholar/activists and are held accountable for their own learning.
- The principal and teachers are reflective practitioners, continuously reviewing and modifying practice to better meet the needs of the students.
- The school generates and uses appropriate assessment data very well to measure its own performance and to inform planning and goal-setting for the whole school as well as for each student, class and grade.
- Students hold their teachers and school in high regard, and all members of the school community treat one another with respect and consideration.

What the school needs to improve

- Measure the progress of all student groups of interest within the school against previous performance.
- Refine monitoring of ethnic groups to take account of relevant sub-groups.
- Build on existing good practice to further develop differentiation of instruction so that every teacher has the skills to meet the varying needs of each student.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists is deeply committed to preparing its students to “read, write and speak critically, persuasively, and independently” and to “succeed in high school, college and the workplace”. The school’s overall goals, and the efforts of the administration and all members of staff, are directed at achieving these aims for all its students. The school is actively using all available data to analyze its performance, identify needs and plan next steps to accelerate students’ progress.

The school perceives its students as “scholar/activists”, and this view is understood and shared by parents and students. Many students enter the school below proficiency in literacy, but all are consistently encouraged to see themselves as readers and writers and to take responsibility for their own learning.

The principal is a role model to staff and students. Members of staff agree that he leads by example and takes his colleagues forward with him. Students admire him. They say he “expects students to work” but has time for everyone and is like “a second Dad.” He has already effected considerable change and has the capacity to continue to lead the school in ongoing improvement.

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 principal and teachers make very good use of data to build their understanding of students’ performance. Structures for gathering data are clear, systematic and consistently used by all staff. The school assesses all students four times a year using the Northwest Education Association (NWEA) interim assessment program, and the results are immediately analyzed and used to identify students’ strengths and to plan how to address gaps in their learning. Teachers carefully maintain up to date records of each student’s class and homework levels. In addition the school assesses students every three weeks as well as at the end of each 6 to 7 week cycle. The data is discussed in detail to understand how each student is progressing and to inform next steps. Students and their parents are kept informed of each student’s performance through mid-cycle progress reports and end of cycle narrative report cards.

The school frequently updates its understanding of different groups of students, and both English language learners and special education students are very carefully monitored. For example, grade 6 teachers volunteered to give extra after-school tutoring to a number of students with individual education plans when assessment at the end of cycle 1 showed these students were not making sufficient progress.

Data is collected and used to monitor the performance of different groups of students of interest to the school, including by ethnicity and by gender. For example, the school has noted the achievement gap between girls and boys and is considering strategies to address this. It is also carefully monitoring the progress of over-age students as part of the drive to raise their levels of achievement. The school measures the progress of its Hispanic students as a group and is now beginning to identify sub-groups, including recent arrivals to the country, to track in greater detail in order to evaluate the success of its intervention and instructional strategies.

The school constantly looks for new ways to use its data to support further improvement, including comparisons of performance across different groups and with other schools. However, the lack of historic data means that the school is not yet able to measure progress against its own previous performance over time.

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 well developed.

The administration and faculty meet frequently in different groups to review and revise performance and to inform next steps. Opportunities to plan together are included in the weekly schedule and the relevant data is consistently used as a basis for planning. In addition, members of staff come together for ten days in August to work collaboratively in setting goals and developing curriculum plans and timeframes. As a result all members of staff have a very clear understanding of how the data has informed decisions and a shared commitment to achieving the school’s goals. Data is used very well to identify issues relating to specific students. Students and their parents are regularly informed about progress and about next targets. Students are constantly expected to evaluate their own and other students’ performance, and as a result they become increasingly independent learners, accountable for their own progress.

The group of students in greatest need of improvement changes constantly in response to the school’s careful analysis of the data. Very careful attention is paid to meeting the needs of all identified students. Advisories ensure that they get individual personalized general support. Extra tutoring is provided, and, as many students are below proficiency in literacy when they enter the school, a special education teacher works collaboratively in the grade 6 classes to help accelerate their progress. Public School 198’s school support team has helped teachers, especially those from grade 6, to develop apt individual education plans, working with cluster teachers, the special education teacher and parents to ensure students’ targets are appropriate and measurable.

The school’s very high expectations are explicit throughout the school and are shared by staff, students and parents. The ‘Family Contract’ is displayed everywhere in the school and both students and parents respect its principles. Successes and achievements are widely and regularly celebrated. Students see themselves as being “prepared for college and life”, to be “learners for life” and that the teachers “expect so much.” Parents value the school’s expectation that their children should “go to college.”

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 has chosen its curriculum and periodic assessments to best meet the needs of its students, and curriculum maps show how the selected material integrates with the mandated curriculum to generate meaningful information. The majority of students enter grade 6 with below level reading skills so the school has placed emphasis on enabling students to read well. The curriculum is regularly adjusted in response to needs identified through data analysis. For example, data analysis outcomes prompted teachers to form a literacy council to support the drive for improved literacy and to ensure a consistent approach across classes and subjects to reinforce students’ confidence and understanding. The literacy initiative is further supported by the fine arts, music, and physical and health programs.

Teachers fully accept their accountability for improving instruction and student outcomes and are constantly reviewing and revising their strategies. A teacher new to the school identified teachers’ “constant reflection” as a strength of the school. In lessons students know what they are doing, and why they are doing it. They participate and behave very well, and their learning is differentiated because of the varied activities they experience across the curriculum. Most teachers have a good understanding of the ways in which they can help children to remain on task and learn effectively, but the school recognizes that not all members of staff are yet equally skilled at providing differentiated instruction.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are made in response to identified needs. For instance, the school buys time from the literacy consultant because of the need to rapidly improve literacy levels, and a special education teacher has been hired to work as a collaborative team teacher in grade 6 English language arts to provide further specialist support. As a result, students are making improved progress. In addition the schedule has been adjusted to give teachers more time for grade meetings, to facilitate joint planning as well as professional development.

In this small school every student is known personally to all members of staff and students feel safe and secure. The strong advisory structure ensures that every student knows at least one adult in the school who cares about them and in whom they can confide; as students said “everyone knows everyone” and “everyone has someone concerned about them”. They also recognize that they need to be in school in order to progress. The rigorous attendance procedures are well understood by students and their parents, and students value the incentives offered for good attendance records.

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 principal leads by example, motivating staff and students and setting a clear vision and direction for the work of the school. He is very highly respected by all members of the school community and has a significant capacity to manage continuous improvement. He has explicit expectations of all members of staff but in return teachers say he wants to hear their views, is “open to ideas” and decisions “can be influenced by every member of the

school.” Members of staff have a high level of commitment to the school and its students; they feel “treated as professionals” and empowered to contribute to school planning. New teachers are expected to “buy into the school’s goals” including a readiness to learn how to use data appropriately, commitment to the advisory role and willingness to attend the ten days’ planning time in August.

Differentiated professional development is an ongoing priority and is based on needs identified through surveys and by analysis of data. The principal works tirelessly to provide as many opportunities as possible for staff to acquire skills and knowledge, including the confidence and competence to use data effectively, so that they and their students can experience and enjoy success. The school is pro-active in its professional development planning, and the administration includes a staff developer who meets with teachers regularly on an individual basis to ensure they are provided with the skills necessary to meet the school’s goals. The ten day August institute provides an opportunity for training as well as collaborative planning. The administration regularly visits classrooms and both formal and informal observations are used to drive professional development decisions as well as to identify good practice and monitor students’ progress.

The school is very well managed on a daily basis; procedures are efficient, effective and well understood so the school runs very smoothly. Students benefit from the school’s partnerships with a number of organizations. For example, Casita Maria helps fund in-school and after-school tutoring work and is helping to fund the construction of a new building for the school, ASPIRA subsidizes after school intervention work, and the International Youth Leadership Institute provides support for science teaching as well as counseling support for students with behavioral issues.

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 well developed.

The school’s goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan, which were based on detailed analysis of data and collaboratively agreed, drive the school’s work. The principal’s performance review is closely aligned with the Comprehensive Education Plan to meet the school’s goals and reflects the frequent updating of these goals which results from the ongoing analysis of student data.

Students are consistently monitored individually, on a daily or weekly basis in some cases, and within and across classes and grades. This process is rigorously carried out and is well embedded in the school’s procedures, with clearly defined timescales and checkpoints associated with the program of periodic assessment. The school also measures its performance compared to schools with like demographics, through visits to other schools, and analysis of their data on achievement and attendance.

The principal and teachers are very reflective practitioners, constantly reviewing and modifying practice to better meet the needs of the students. Short- and medium-term plans and targets are continuously modified and revised in the light of interim NWEA outcomes and the frequent cycle assessments. Longer-term planning is informed by these outcomes and full evaluation of goals and plans is an integral part of the school’s planning cycle.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists (MS 269)	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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.	∅	✓	+
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