



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Bronx Green Middle School

**Middle School 326
2441 Wallace Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Emily Becker

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Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx Green Middle School serves 189 students in grade 6. Nine percent of the population is English language learners and 13% are special education students. Fifty-seven percent are Hispanic, 23% are Black, 12% are White, 6% are Asian and 2% represent other backgrounds. The school is Title I eligible with the proportion of qualifying students exceeding that of the City average. Attendance averages 91%, on par with the City. Bronx Green plans to add a grade each year until it reaches its full complement of grades 6 through 8 in 2008. It shares a facility with three other middle schools.

As an empowerment school, Bronx Green has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development service, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's vision is well understood, and is embraced by students, staff and the community.
- Classrooms are inviting and supportive environments for learning.
- Advisory classes support students' social and emotional growth.
- Interdisciplinary units of study reinforce the school's environmental theme.
- Students benefit from curricular and extracurricular enrichment experiences that broaden their understanding of the world beyond their neighborhood.
- Students are well known and cared for by the staff and the principal.
- School leadership models collaborative decision making.
- Staff participation on committees is widespread and teachers are empowered to share in responsibility for the school's development.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish practices and procedures for gathering, analyzing and using statistical and anecdotal data to inform decisions about the school and its students.
- Use data to develop plans for school-wide improvement and for increasing student achievement.
- Provide professional development in classroom management, data analysis, curriculum design and differentiated instruction.
- Create a faculty handbook that codifies practices relative to all aspects of the school's functioning.
- Create structures for the routine evaluation of progress towards the attainment of goals and the revision of plans.
- Develop instructional programs to meet the specific needs of special education students, English language learners and students needing academic interventions.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school.

Bronx Green has made progress in establishing its unique focus and identity since it opened less than a year ago. The development of its student-designed garden serves as a focal point for its interdisciplinary, environmental theme. Much of the work of the teachers and the principal has centered on the development of units of study, establishing a functional instructional schedule and addressing students' behavioral issues. The use of data for instructional or school improvement planning remains a goal, as does the practice of planning and goal setting. Most teachers and the principal are new to their respective roles and are working towards identifying the school's next steps.

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 undeveloped.

Thus far, the school has focused more on affective rather than academic data to understand its students. The Princeton Review has been administered, but its results have not been used to diagnose the particular learning needs of students. Teachers' grades have been compared relative to establishing a grading policy but student performance has not been compared across teachers of the same subject. Student performance by marking period is not routinely tracked by administration.

The school has not disaggregated student performance data by ethnicity. Nor has it looked deeply at the comparative performance of special education students and English language learners. With regard to other categories of interest, when incident reports revealed that boys were more likely to misbehave, the social worker started a boys group to address this issue. She also started a group for girls, one for new students and another for students experiencing family problems.

Comparison with the school's past progress is not possible as yet. Nor is comparison across grades. Comparative data regarding student progress according to academic subjects has not been developed. The principal meets with her counterparts in the building and in her network, and comparisons of progress are discussed to provide the school with a wider picture. The network tracks and compares the attendance data of its member schools.

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 undeveloped.

The proposal for the school's founding served as a framework for the initial structures of the school, such as its mission, schedule, governance and accountability goals. As the school year unfolded, aspects of the original proposal, such as its schedule and its mission, were altered to provide greater clarity to the school's functioning. Much of the planning in the school, to date, has been reactive rather than proactive. The school leadership team is in the early stages of developing the Comprehensive Education Plan. The overall thrust for the school, expressed through actions rather than through a plan, has been building a community. The recent groundbreaking for the school's garden, attended by students, parents, community members and the press serves as a real manifestation of this goal.

Students exhibiting behavior problems have been a particular focus area and attempts to address their needs have included regrouping homerooms and advisories, forming an intervention homeroom, instituting behavior contracts and detention, and creating a number of small group counseling sessions. Students who have achieved at higher levels as indicated by their classroom grades have been offered the opportunity to participate in training for the high school entrance examination.

Special education students and English language learners are instructed in the general education classroom. The school lacks adequate licensed staff to ensure that the needs of these students are met. The school is at an early stage of developing academic intervention services to meet the needs of those students who are academically at risk.

The school communicates its expectations to students and parents through the student handbook, mailings, e-mail, report cards, parent conferences and calls from teachers if students are experiencing difficulties. Parents are invited on field trips and are in good attendance at events such as the recent groundbreaking and a publishing party. Parents are welcomed in the school and appreciate the accessibility of teachers and the principal. The school is working to enlist greater parental support for improving the behavior of some students. Students are, increasingly, being asked to set goals for improving their achievement and their behavior.

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.

Teachers are receiving assistance in developing their curriculum in English and mathematics from outside consultants. They are implementing balanced literacy and Impact Mathematics. Science is supported by a curriculum from Columbia University. The social studies content area currently lacks sufficient expertise and direction. All subjects are reinforced by the field studies curriculum which is integrated into each student's program and is at the core of the school's project-based environmental theme. Instruction in some areas is engaging. Students especially like the variety of activities offered through field studies which included many trips and opportunities for experiential learning. The cross-disciplinary nature of the instructional units adds interest for students as they carry a concept from one discipline to another. Students meet several times a week in small advisory groups to support their social and emotional development. They point to these groups as a place where they can share their problems and receive support from their teachers and peers.

Overall, teachers are learning how best to deliver their curriculum because one third of the teaching staff are new to the profession. Teachers' planning is not routinely based on needs revealed by the analysis of student data and differentiation of instruction is not widespread, although a positive start has been made in English language arts with the support of external consultants. The principal has not held teachers responsible for improving outcomes for their students through data-based discussions, but she does expect teachers to correct behaviors that she deems unacceptable.

Recent budgetary, staffing and scheduling decisions have been informed by student data. For instance, the school hired an instructor for its English language learners in December to begin to address their needs. Additional leveled literacy texts were purchased to meet reading levels revealed through teachers' running records. Funds were allocated to support the after school activities program and teacher participation on various committees. The school's schedule underwent several revisions to bring greater clarity to the flow of the day.

Attendance is tracked daily and student's homes are contacted each day that they are absent. Long term absences are addressed through letters and home visits. Students and homerooms receive awards for good attendance. The school's goal for the year is 95%. The current average is 91%.

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 undeveloped.

The school criteria for new hires includes a willingness to learn, an inclination to work collaboratively, a value of process over product, and a reflective nature. The ability to analyze and use data has not been one of the requirements as yet. A significant number of teachers are in their first year of teaching. They are supported by a new teacher mentor and by experienced teachers in literacy and math. The lack of common planning time makes a high level of support more difficult to provide and also inhibits the delivery of professional development within the context of the regular schedule. However, English and mathematics teachers do receive support from coaches who, especially in English, help to hone teachers' skills. Faculty retreats and summer professional development has focused on team building as well as curriculum development. Staff have identified the need for professional development in classroom management, data analysis, differentiated instruction and the Understanding by Design model of curriculum development.

Some teachers have visited other schools to observe instruction, and teachers have also had the opportunity to co-teach which has given them the chance to observe how their colleagues implemented material that they too were teaching, and how they interacted with the same students. In addition, lead teachers supported new teachers with this schedule.

The principal is a frequent presence in classrooms and may comment on instructional practice but has completed few of the required formal observations. A major focus of her class visits has been student behavior. The principal is respected for her dedication to bringing forth the unique design of the school and for her collaborative approach to leadership. The establishment of teams for student support services, hiring, advisory and scheduling gives teachers the opportunity to participate in the leadership of the school. The vast majority of teachers serve on one or more committees. After several difficult challenges to the progressive practices that she attempted to implement, the staff have

refocused its energies on finding common ground and moving forward in a united fashion. Greater order has been established in the school recently especially through the work of the Culture Club, which is the name given to the large group of staff members who are working with Community of Unity, which has changed the climate of the school in a positive way.

The school has captured the interest of several civic, cultural and academic institutions that have provided curriculum materials, garden materials, student teachers, and administrative interns. As yet, the school has not developed partnerships with outside bodies in support of its academic goals.

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

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school lacks plans and interventions that include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments. Planning has been informal and is characterized by brainstorming, leading to somewhat organic decision making that manifests itself in actions rather than in documents with clearly articulated goals, timelines, responsible parties, and measures of success. The lack of sharp analysis of the available data has inhibited the school in identifying issues requiring clear planning, particularly with respect to individual students needs.

Comparisons of student progress within classrooms is undertaken by classroom teachers but is not interrogated for the purpose of making interim diagnostic assessments or measuring the effectiveness of plans such as, for example, the curriculum. All literacy, science and field study teachers follow the same curriculum. They have met informally to discuss lessons and to determine what worked and where changes needed to be made, but these meetings have not taken sufficient account of data in order to ensure that evaluation is rigorous. Comparison of student progress across schools is premature.

The school has administered the Princeton Review as a periodic assessment but has not used its results or its accessory supports as diagnostic measures of student progress or to plan and implement interventions. As an empowerment school Bronx Green undertook an action research project. It identified students who were suspected of having difficulty with the skill of inference in literacy on their overall performance on State tests and is still investigating interventions and professional development to address this weakness.

As the school's first year draws to a close, it has focused its reflections on its successes and areas for improvement. Results from the school's recent retreat demonstrate a readiness to formulate actions to carry Bronx Green forward into its second year.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Green Middle School (MS 326)	∅	✓	+
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		