



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**School for Excellence**

**High School 404**

**1100 Boston Road  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Wade Fuller**

**Dates of review: March 26 - 27, 2007**

**Reviewer: Mike Sutton**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

This high school is in the south Bronx and has 419 students enrolled from grade 9 through 12. Most of the students live locally but a minority travels substantial distances.

There are 37% Hispanic, 35% Black, 14% White and 14% Asian and other ethnic groups. Most students speak English as their first language, with a minority speaking Spanish. The proportion of students at the early stages of learning English is low, at less than 5%.

The level of attendance is 80% and in line with that for similar schools but lower than the City average. There are 87% of the students who receive Title 1 funding which is higher than the average for similar schools and City-wide schools. Special education students make up around 12% of the school's enrollment which is higher than for other schools.

The 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.

The school opened in September 2002 and occupies the same building as three other schools, sharing a gymnasium, library and cafeteria.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is lead by a principal who gives tirelessly of his efforts in trying to ensure the best education for all the students.
- There is an immensely dedicated and hard working staff.
- All the staff know the students extremely well and relations throughout the school are very good.
- The school has established itself well, and with a strong and increasingly successful focus on preparing students for college and continued education.
- The school has created a climate where learning can take place.
- The school is making good use of technology to improve students' learning, particularly in mathematics, where achievement is rising faster than in other subjects.
- There are good systems of support for students who need help or advice with personal problems.
- The school has made good adjustments to the curriculum to match the work for students more closely to their needs, aptitudes, interests and skills.
- The school has a wide range of data on students' achievement.

### What the school needs to improve

- Gather data systematically or organize it to help understand the progress of key groups of students.
- Observe the progress of special education students.
- Improve the analysis of the data to show any trends or patterns across grades, subjects and particular groups of students.
- Focus school improvement planning on the outcomes for students.
- Clearly quantify interim or final targets.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is an undeveloped school.**

Since it opened nearly five years ago, the principal has provided strong leadership to take the school successfully through a difficult period of expansion. It is now firmly established with a clear focus on helping students make progress towards college placements. The staff work very hard to help students overcome a wide range of academic, personal and social problems. There is a very positive climate of care and understanding and the teachers know each student very well. There is a strong body of mutual respect and trust between students and teachers. There are good daily routines and as a result, the school is an orderly environment where learning can take place. The school continues to focus strongly on improving students' attendance. The school has taken positive steps to adapt the curriculum to meet the particular needs of the students. Good use of technology is helping the students make progress in reading and in mathematics particularly.

The key areas where the school is undeveloped are in the gathering, analysis and use of data regarding students' achievements and progress. The school relies too heavily on its informal knowledge and information. Although much data is gathered, this is not sufficiently systematized to provide the school with the information it needs to understand how well it is doing overall. The progress of special education students is not checked or monitored rigorously enough and information about these students is missing. There is insufficient analysis of the data gathered and this impedes the school's abilities to explore where problems with students' progress may lie. There is not enough information from which the school leaders, or those with subject responsibilities, can construct precise plans, set goals or measure the impact of their plans on students' achievements.

### 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.**

The school gathers data on students' progress from statutory assessments and from teachers' evaluations of progress as well as from completion of credits. These are being added to by computer generated progress reports on students' gains in reading skills. The teachers know their students well and can describe the problems they each have and the successes they are achieving. The different sets of information on students' progress are not yet gathered in a sufficiently systematic way. The school does not evaluate its overall performance consistently or use the data to examine different aspects of students' performance. The analysis that has taken place is patchy and lacks coherence. As a result, the teachers and school leaders do not have a clear enough picture of progress between grades, classes or subjects or of other particular groups of students. They do not make comparisons on a wider front, such as against similar schools or other schools more generally.

The school relies heavily on information from its graduation results and from external evaluation of the students' accumulation of credits to gain an overview of its successes. It does not look closely enough at this data to determine what trends or patterns may warrant further investigation. For example, there are twice as many female students in the advanced mathematics class in the twelfth grade. This does not reflect the gender balance in the school. Similarly, the data on students' credit accumulation suggest that failure to gain credits occurs unevenly across the school year and across grades. The school has explored neither aspect to see, for example if there are particular issues in specific subjects or grades.

The school does not have sufficient information on special education students when they join the school. In many cases the students' records are missing or take an inordinate time to track down. This creates challenges for the school when trying to meet their needs. The school has not put in place a sufficiently clear alternative to give the teachers the information they need about students' strengths and weaknesses in key skills.

**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 lack of consistent collection, recording and analysis of data is a barrier to planning at all levels. The teachers use their informal and class based assessments of students to plan work for their classes but there is little strategic planning at grade or subject level based on a secure knowledge of the current levels of students' achievements. There are two areas where the school has made some recent progress. In mathematics, the analysis of students' errors on Regents examination papers last year prompted the introduction of good quality calculators and the curriculum was modified to make use of the technology. The students enjoy this approach and their confidence, understanding and achievements have improved as a result. In English, the analysis of assessments has shown significant improvements in all grades as a result of the computerized literacy program. In neither English nor mathematics has this information yet resulted in a coherent development plan to build on these early successes or to set targets for the future. The recommendations of the report from the analysis of the English data, such as the need to re-focus the use of the computerized program on the lowest achieving students, have yet to be implemented or prioritized in any development plans.

The teachers know their students well and give constant help and encouragement in class, particularly to those who struggle with basic skills. The team of assistants provides good support in this. The arrangements for special education students are unsatisfactory. Substantial numbers of these students arrive at the school, frequently with files and individual education plans missing or incomplete. The team of teachers with direct responsibility for this group of students has insufficient information on which to construct precise plans to meet the students' immediate needs or to support and advise classroom teachers. Interim progress checks give much subjective information based on teachers' observations but lack specific information about progress in improving basic skills. The school makes enormous efforts to inspire students to achieve and to raise their personal expectations and goals. The school makes good use of internships and placements which provide college credits. Much attention is given to grades 11 and 12 to make up missed credits through after school and summer school classes. Too many students however, slip behind in credits during grades 9 and 10.

**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.**

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. There is an imaginative approach to developing basic skills by providing students with more opportunities for collaborative and individual project based work. This approach is enjoyed by the students and engages their interests particularly when themes are used which span all classes. The approach encourages thinking skills and deeper understanding of a wide range of issues. The teachers assess the students’ work but there is no common agreed method for collecting or analyzing this information and the school relies largely on subjective views or final end of year outcomes to gauge the success of its approach.

The teachers, their assistants and administrative support staff work extremely hard to make lessons interesting and to ensure their students make progress. The work they present is usually challenging but is not differentiated sufficiently to meet the needs of all students. A key factor for this shortcoming is the lack of firm information about students’ overall progress. The school has budgeted appropriately for important developments such as the introduction of calculators and the new reading program. The latter was financed to support a phased introduction, but no systematic plan was established to determine which students should have priority. The hiring of specific staff has brought particular developments to mathematics and also offered support with college applications. The lack of full time coaches reduces the school’s capacity to provide strategic leadership at this level. Most scheduling matters are arranged to meet students’ needs.

A very significant strength of the school is the climate of mutual trust built between students and staff. All students feel they have someone to turn to for advice and help. The staff go to extraordinary lengths to help and support them, even as far as helping students to gain employment during vacations or at weekends. The principal and parent coordinator are instrumental in this and in supporting and liaising with families. For many students the school is a haven in their troubled and at times, chaotic lives. In discussion, they unanimously agreed on the depth of support they get from staff and particularly from the principal who has a deep understanding of their issues and problems. The school works hard to maintain and improve attendance levels. Procedures are clear and rigorous and particular problems are followed up carefully. It does not analyze the attendance data to get a clearer picture of patterns and trends in order to target its efforts more precisely.

**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 school hires staff primarily in their abilities to understand and communicate with the students and establish good relations. They are also expected to have strong abilities to work in teams and to work flexibly and imaginatively. These parameters are evident throughout the school, with staff adept at adjusting their plans and programs to suit the needs of particular classes. The importance of having staff who can analyze information is recognized at senior levels through the assistant principal and the part time consultant. This aspect of educational expertise is not as evident at subject and grade level.

Staff take every opportunity to engage in professional development. They use staff and grade meetings for discussion to improve their practice and pedagogic skills. One innovation which has had significant impact is the requirement to produce their own researched portfolio on some aspect of their work. This is no easy option and makes staff reflect and consider many aspects of what they do. Professional development does not reflect whole school needs sufficiently because development planning does not set out clearly enough what those needs are. Teachers are further supported through programs of formal and informal observations of their work by the principal. Informal inter-visitations between classes are arranged between teachers. The range of feedback gives teachers useful, additional help in improving their work. Planning at all levels is weak because there is no overarching strategic direction set through the Comprehensive Education Plan. Teachers and department leaders do as well as they can but development is fragmented and there is too little knowledge about the areas of success or those that need attention.

The principal is highly respected. He has lead the school through difficult times to reach its current position. He has ensured that the focus is strongly on college placements for students and in this respect the school has achieved good levels of early success. The school generally runs smoothly and main routines are understood and followed. There are strong support services for students. The school social workers and the parent coordinator as well as the special education team all play an essential part in helping the school raise the level of achievements for students and in addressing their personal problems. Work with external partners is helping raise students' aspirations. Support from the school for the Young Officer Training Corps for example, has given a substantial number of students a pride in themselves and a purpose to how they use their spare time.

**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 has insufficiently robust systems for gathering information about students' progress and this impedes its ability to plan precisely targeted developments. The data currently available is not analyzed thoroughly enough to contribute to the design or thrust of planning. The school is insecurely placed to challenge itself further by making comparisons either between grades, classes, subjects or from year to year. The Comprehensive Education Plan is incomplete, and many aspects lack specificity. There are very few precise, quantifiable targets for improvement, largely because in most areas, the school does not have a clear understanding of where it is starting from. There are few benchmarks or interim markers by which it can judge progress.

Planning for important areas of the school's work such as for special education students or for intervention services does not take sufficient account of the views of the particular staff. Plans are not shared sufficiently widely and as a result, those who have responsibility for planning at different levels do not have a clear plan to guide them. Strategic plans do not contribute enough to staff development planning because they lack the detail necessary for staff to know exactly what needs to be improved and in which subjects, grades and classes.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: School for Excellence (HS 404)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>	X		

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>	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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>	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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>	X		

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is 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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>	X		