

**Bronx High School For The Visual Arts**

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**High School 418**

**50 Antin Place**

**The Bronx**

**NY, 10462**

**Principal: Dr. George York**

**Dates of review: May 22 – 24, 2006**

**Reviewer: John Godwood**

**Cambridge Education**

# Bronx High School For The Visual Arts

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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school

The Bronx High School for the Visual Arts opened in September 2002 with 84 grade 9 students. It has grown each year and now has 350 students from grades 9 through 12. It is in an area of deprivation and 60% of students are Title 1 Eligible. Attainment on entry is well below average. Almost 20% of students are special education students or English language learners.

The school is supported with additional funding from the New Visions for Public Schools. Its mission is to provide a quality educational program in and through the arts. It has partnerships with Lehman College Art Gallery, Wave Hill and Bronx Museum and a wide variety of other arts and cultural organizations.

The school is situated in a building with two other schools. A lack of space in the current school year means that during the lunch break, another school uses its classrooms. The library is also used throughout the day for additional classes by the three schools.

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## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- A clear mission that motivates and inspires staff guides the school.
- Staff is highly motivated to support and care for their students, which results in good relationships and trust between most students and staff.
- Students feel safe and behavior is generally good.
- There is a strong art curriculum of foundation and elective courses that is enriched very well through partnerships with art galleries and cultural organizations.
- The quality of students' artwork and the standard of display are high.
- The curriculum is designed carefully to provide links between subjects and thus increase its relevance to students.
- Standards in mathematics in Regents examinations are above those of similar schools and above city schools generally. Standards in English are comparable with similar schools.
- The school uses data well to track individual students' progress and provides additional support to students who are underachieving.
- The principal, cabinet and staff are highly reflective and self-critical, constantly looking for ways to improve their practice and the success achieved by students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Now that the school has grown in size, there is a need for clearer structures and guidance to improve communication and ensure that staff implements policies consistently.
- Develop a more consistent approach to student discipline so that staff and students are very clear about what is expected, expectations are consistently applied and students have clear consequences for breaking rules.
- Use professional development to increase the extent to which teachers in subject teams use data to evaluate the success of their subject and to plan improvements.
- Extend the growing use of data to evaluate the progress made by groups of students and use this in forward planning.
- Clarify the roles of the guidance counselors, advisers and dean in their complementary roles of supporting students.
- Consider setting all students targets for their performance.

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## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The principal and staff have a clear vision for the school. Teachers are committed to providing the best for their students and there are good relationships and trust. The curriculum is enriched by the focus on art and the partnerships with outside organizations. Standards in art are high. The school's use of data to review its performance is proficient and it is aware of its major areas for development. Data is used well to monitor the progress of individual students and identify those who need additional support.

The school has grown significantly since it's opening in 2002. It is widely recognized by staff at all levels that there is a need now for clearer management systems to improve consistency and communication. This applies particularly in the area of student discipline.

#### **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.**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient overall.**

The school has made a lot of progress in using data to evaluate how successfully it is teaching different courses and to monitor individual students' progress. It has a great deal of data on students' performance and achievements. The use of this has been significantly facilitated over the past year by the creation of a database of student transcripts.

The principal and school leaders regularly use data to evaluate the academic success of the school overall and of individual courses. They use data effectively to inform changes that are needed in the curriculum and staffing.

In Regents examinations, the school does as well as similar schools in English. In mathematics, it does better than similar schools and city schools generally. It does less well than similar schools in science and social studies. The principal is well aware of these variations and has implemented plans to improve standards.

The school makes very good use of its data to monitor the progress of individual students. This is done regularly and systematically. Where students are causing concern, they are quickly offered support that includes counseling and additional academic input. In some cases this has been very effective and has enabled students to catch up and stay on track.

An area for development in the use of data is the evaluation of the achievements of groups of students, such as boys, girls, special education students, English language

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learners, etc, and to use this to inform curriculum planning or interventions. At present, the school does not have value added data to measure the progress that students make over time, though the principal is keen to make use of such data.

**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.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's comprehensive education plan is a thorough and well-written document. It is firmly based on the school's philosophy. Performance data in Regents examinations and class pass rates are used to inform the school's overall goals. There are specific targets for subject performance, although these are not informed sufficiently by the previous performance in each subject and comparison with similar schools.

The guidance counselors monitor each student's progress carefully. Those who are identified as underachieving are set clear goals to improve their standards. They are provided with good additional support, including after school programs, night school and summer school. Parents are involved in setting and reviewing the goals.

Other students are not consistently set clear targets for their achievement. Some set their own targets. Students feel well informed on their progress from their report cards, but feel that teachers vary in how much information they give on progress and that some do not give enough.

All members of the school community are committed to students' achievement and well-being, and these drive their activity. However, the systematic use of data by teachers to review performance in their subjects is at a very early stage of development.

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

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The curriculum is planned carefully. It is strongly based on the school's philosophy of education in and through the arts. Students understand the relevance of their work through the many links with arts and cultural organizations and gain in maturity through presenting their exhibitions to the faculty. They experience links between subjects, such as art and science, and use computers creatively in their artwork. Their artwork enables them to express their own ideas and develop their creativity. Data is used to review the curriculum and identify areas that need strengthening. Students are frustrated by the limitations that the buildings put on the physical education curriculum. A minority of students feel that the work is not sufficiently challenging.

Budget decisions and staff appointments are driven flexibly by the needs of the students. Data is used to inform staffing needs. For example, guidance counselors were appointed to improve the support for students in preparing for college and for underachieving

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students. This has been effective. A dean was appointed to provide more consistent discipline.

The quality of teaching engages most students. There are good relationships between students and teachers and generally good behavior. Visiting experts, such as practicing artists, enriches teaching. The principal and assistant principal regularly observe teaching. Formal lesson observations are of good quality, and provide teachers with clear feedback on what they are doing well and what they need to improve. Where teachers are under-performing, additional support is provided through mentoring. There are also informal observations and some opportunities for teachers to observe each other, although these are not well established.

There is too much inconsistency in teachers' expectations of students' conduct in class, for example whether students have electronic devices. Students say that the rules are clear, but the extent to which they are enforced varies. Teachers feel that students do have sufficient accountability for their conduct, such as promptness to lessons. The consequences for inappropriate conduct are not clear enough or enforced sufficiently.

Students feel well supported by their teachers. They trust their teachers and feel they can approach them with academic or personal problems.

The school works very hard to maintain a high rate of attendance. Its efforts include close monitoring and incentives for good attendance. Attendance data is scrutinized carefully and used to trigger interventions. The procedures are thorough and are implemented consistently. Despite this, however, the attendance this year has dropped.

**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.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient overall.**

The school has a clear mission that is centered on maximizing students' achievement in and through the arts. The mission motivates and unifies the staff. When the school was opened four years ago, it was very small: decisions were taken by consensus and student discipline was based on trust and individual support from each student's advisor. The school has grown each year and has reached a stage where it needs clearer structures and organization. School leaders and many teachers share this view.

The principal has clear values of excellence and a child-centered focus that are respected by all staff. The school runs smoothly, because the staff is committed and there are good relationships between students and staff. However, procedures are not sufficiently clear and, as a result, there is too much inconsistency in how school policies are implemented. School leaders express some frustration that a few teachers are resistant to following school policy that they disagree with. On the other hand, some teachers feel that the lead they are given is not sufficiently consistent or always followed through.

School leaders are working towards a full understanding of how to develop policy in the larger school through consultation and explanation, and how to provide a sufficiently strong lead in implementing policy through making expectations clear, leading by example

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and providing support to staff. There has been some success in this, but there is still some way to go.

Now the school has grown, there is also a need for clearer definition of roles. For example, the complementary roles of the guidance counselors, advisors and the dean in supporting student discipline are not defined clearly enough. Teachers do not know whom they should approach about a problem with a particular student and feel that there is not enough communication between all parties who have responsibility for a student.

The principal, cabinet and staff are highly reflective and self-critical, constantly looking for ways to improve their practice and the success achieved by students. For example, school leaders recently spent a weekend on retreat to review the curriculum. Professional development is provided for teachers. This is mainly done in subject groups for curriculum development. The attendance committee and the guidance counselors monitor data regularly. Data is available to teachers and the leadership team has provided some professional development in how to use it effectively. However, at present there is little autonomous use of data by teachers in departmental teams to evaluate their practice. This is made more difficult to facilitate because the school's structure does not include subject leaders.

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

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's student performance group regularly monitors all students' progress and plans interventions for students who are underachieving. The intervention programs are reviewed regularly.

The principal, assistant principal and guidance counselors undertake thorough self-evaluation on a regular basis. This includes consideration of students' performance using data. They modify plans as a result. However, the comprehensive education plan does not have a built-in structure of interim review.

### **Other key observations**

The school shares its building with two other schools. A lack of space in the current school year means that during the lunch break, another school uses its classrooms. The library is also used throughout the day for additional classes by the three schools. This overcrowding causes some difficulties through a lack of ownership of spaces and lost library books.

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### Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

<b>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.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standards-based,</li> <li>• consistent across students,</li> <li>• capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice,</li> </ul> <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the performance of different students to be compared, and</li> <li>• learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified.</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>	
<p>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.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>	<b>X</b>		
<p>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.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<p>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.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			<b>X</b>
<p>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.</p>		<b>X</b>	
<p>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</p>		<b>X</b>	

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<b>Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	0	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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	
3.6 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	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.9 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>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.</b>	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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, 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	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.		X	

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<b>Quality Statement 5: 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.</b>	o	✓	+
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		<b>x</b>	