



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**Bronx High School for Law and Community
Service**

**Public School 439
500 East Fordham Road
Bronx
NY 10458**

Principal: Gail Joyner-White

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Reviewer: George Wallace

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Bronx High School for Law and Community Service caters for students from grade 9 through grade 12. There are currently 463 students with a ratio of about two thirds girls to one third boys. The school population comprises 54% Hispanic students, 44% Black and 2% other ethnic groups.

The proportion of special education students stands at 14%, and that for English language learners is 10% of the school population.

The school receives Title I funding with nearly 82% of students eligible, which is well above similar schools and the City wide average. Overall attendance is 83% which is low. However, attendance in grades 10, 11 and 12 is higher at approximately 90%. The school is nearly five years old and the current principal has been in post for 3 years.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The care, personal and social development students receive is very good, both to achieve success and overcome difficulties.
- The school knows its students very well and therefore provides courses and support very specific to their needs.
- The principal and senior assistant principal have a broad and knowledgeable understanding of their own school data and its value as a source of information to effect change.
- There is strong attention given to the improvement of students in greatest need.
- Students and their parents know that the school has high expectations which are suitably challenging and aimed at school success.
- The school provides a broad and rich curriculum.
- Teachers know they are accountable for the quality of their teaching and of students' learning.
- Student attendance and engagement are high priorities.
- The school runs smoothly, procedures are clear and through the principal and staff the school has good capacity to improve.
- The strong collaboration and teamwork has, for the most part, led to improvements in teaching and students' achievements.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the breadth of data collected and its use to inform whole school planning and teachers' individual lesson planning.
- Improve the quality of school action planning so that the resultant plan becomes a working document for all in school.
- Once the action plan is in place ensure that there are mechanisms for monitoring the progress of work undertaken to reach goals, and where necessary identify changes that occur to ensure the plan's success.
- Devise a program of professional development based on the school action plan so that all staff know what will be covered, when and why.
- Continue to raise student achievement.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

The school has improved significantly since the arrival of the new principal. The curriculum is broad, rich and now reflects the name of the school. The scheduling has been done in the interests of all students so their various and specific needs are addressed. Students and parents recognize that the school works hard in their interests. They find that nearly all teachers care about them and not only want them to do well, but work with them to ensure that they succeed. Students know they have staff they trust and therefore feel comfortable sharing their successes and concerns with staff. The academic success and the personal and social development of the students are both important to the school. Ground rules and procedures are clear to all so that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

Administrators have the broad picture of student achievement across the school. They use data to track achievement on an annual basis, as well as at several interim periods during the year. They know which students are on track to succeed, those that require specific levels of support and, even in grade 9, those who need significant intervention to aid their learning. The principal has produced an action plan for 2006-07 arising from her accurate understanding of the school strengths and areas of need. However, while it contains key areas of development and substantiated reasons for these, it is not presented in a useful format that all staff can use as a working document. In addition, while the professional development program covers key elements of the school's needs, it is not sufficiently integrated with the action plan.

Teachers work well in teams and draw from each other's expertise. They know they are accountable for the quality of students' learning. Their planning largely reflects the agreed procedures for planning in the school, however, this and the quality of teaching vary across the school. In several lessons it was evident that teachers worked hard to motivate and engage students with most responding positively to their lessons. The good quality of leadership and staff together with satisfactory and improving understanding of self-evaluation indicates that the school has the capacity to improve further.

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 proficient.

The school uses standardized data and its own data in an objective way. The principal analyzes and shares achievement data with teacher teams and individuals on a regular basis. This ensures that the principal and senior staff are acutely aware of the progress being made by students which leads to discussions with staff about whether progress is fast enough, what intervention or specific programs should be in place or why specific students are failing. This data is constantly updated allowing the senior staff to assess the pattern of achievement at various levels across the school, and to make sure that courses suit their needs. For example, the school caters effectively for all students ranging from

the most able academic students whose courses are enriched, especially through the law program to those whose attendance is poor and needs are very specific. In the latter case, it may be that attendance is a problem and strategies are in place to try to succeed even with the most severe cases, to providing evening school for older students who have special circumstances that prevent them from completing their studies in day school. It is through the collection and use of data that the administration identifies patterns of student need. All students are tracked to see the progress being made. Special education students receive close attention and good support, as do those who are English language learners. Student data is not yet fully analyzed by ethnicity, but the data available and used would allow this to happen easily. Data shows boys achieving almost as well as girls. It is increasingly being used directly with teachers as they do not fully appreciate the value of data to improve teaching and overall school performance. Administration use data well to determine progress across the school by grades, classes and subjects and to compare with the school's past performance.

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 Comprehensive Education Plan and the goals set provide a useful picture of achievable priorities for the school. Overall the plan is rather imprecise and does not focus enough on subjects or grades, or time requirements for short, medium and long term planning. Administrators, however, have goals in place for each specific area targeted for improvement. Some plans are highly focused and used to ascertain progress. In particular the attendance plan incorporates strategies that are having a slow but positive impact on raising attendance. Data is used at a good general level with subject teams to set goals. Teachers discuss their data with senior staff and this is beginning to have a positive impact on planning and teaching at the end of a marking period.

The school provides very well for students in greatest need; often the students who are absent the most. Teachers are very knowledgeable about these students, and the range of support and intervention available. Even in the most severe cases, teachers are concerned to do and provide something that will encourage such students to once again get involved with school. There have been several notable successes with students now enjoying school and gaining credits towards their eventual graduation. English language learners are also well supported and make good progress. Parents and students indicate that expectations by teachers of student performance are generally high, and are much higher across the school that they were previously. This is corroborated by the principal, however, it is recognized that expectations are not sufficiently high for all teachers. Parents receive plenty of information from the school, mostly about school events, but equally much contact is via post and telephone calls specifically about their son or daughter. Goals and plans are used for driving student performance, although the goal setting and planning is not uniformly well developed across the school.

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 provides a broad and rich curriculum where students’ needs are central to scheduling. Both the interests and needs of students are matched to serve them very well. As a consequence the school monitors the progress of all students very well. The school is successful in acquiring and using data to track students’ performance. Teachers are also acutely aware that they are responsible for the effectiveness of students’ learning. They know it is good quality teaching that helps to draw students into the school. Students recognize that most, but not all teachers work hard to make their courses are interesting and challenging. Teachers, for the most part plan on the basis of their knowledge of students’ needs. They interact well with students, although in some cases they need to draw the quieter students into the lesson. Differentiation is carried out mainly through questioning, but is an area for further development.

Budgeting decisions are closely linked to scheduling which is directly linked to students’ needs. Staffing decisions are based on the principal’s vision for the school, which is one based on giving students strong opportunities to succeed as a consequence of varied, interesting and well targeted experiences. The school uses its hard and soft data to ensure that the courses students follow and the levels of intervention and support are right for each student. The school also makes sure that no student is repeating courses where they already have obtained the necessary credits.

Teaching very largely engages students. In several lessons the interaction between students and their teachers was extremely good revealing a genuine interest in the topics. In nearly all cases staff respect students and want them to achieve their best. Teachers know their students well and are interested in them succeeding. They care and work hard to provide the right learning situations to aid their students’ academic, personal and social development. Students know and trust sufficient numbers of staff to be able to share concerns and aspirations should they wish to. Student attendance is low, brought down through the poor attendance of grade 9. The school’s attendance plans and strategies are extremely good and having a positive, although slow impact on raising attendance. This is an area of high priority and is linked with aspects of the courses that the school.

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 hiring process is thorough and fair. The appointments panels ensure that they test the level of expectations prospective teachers have of Bronx students. Increasingly as well as confirming abilities to teach, the hiring process tests for a knowledge of and capacity to use data. The professional development program varies in quality. It is driven by the needs of students and the outline goals of the school’s action plan but, while the program for teachers to engage in external training is valued, the in-house program is under-developed. Currently the program focuses on the core goals of the school, but does not link closely enough with all school development action points in a systematic way. Professional development through subject meetings is valued and useful.

The principal frequently observes lessons. Oral feedback is most frequently given, however, no analysis of the feedback findings is done to ascertain which are the common positive features and which the areas for improvement. This data does not feed into the professional development program and best practice is not shared enough to improve teaching. The principal and assistant principal share the responsibility of attending team meetings and their presence helps ensure that the planning is highly focused and in line with the school's goals. In addition they evaluate the data they receive through the year and feedback core findings to staff, therefore effecting change when required.

Students, staff and parents strongly respect the principal. In their different ways they recognize that although a strong leader the principal is also compassionate and has a 'hands-on' approach across the school. Therefore she knows the students well and is driven by a mission to ensure that students enjoy their learning and achieve success. The school has a good staff handbook, procedures are clear and agreed so the school to run smoothly. The school has a wide variety of valued external partners. Their involvement is aligned to the school's 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 proficient.

The school's plan is a product of an accurate evaluation of the school's data. However, although a proficient document, it is a combination of a plan and a position statement and therefore does not contain any specific references to interim evaluation leading to changes that may be required. The principal is acutely aware of the need to raise the quality of action planning so that is the plan becomes a working document for the senior staff and also for the rest of the staff. In this way, unlike now, interim measures can be made to ensure the plan is on track to meet specific goals. Comparisons of student progress within grades, subjects and classes is kept, analyzed and acted upon. The principal knows what she wants to achieve and therefore has a focus on specific data to tell her whether students are on course to achieve credits and reach diploma standards for graduation. As such revisions to the program for students are made and, if required, interventions are successfully used. Currently the overall school goals may not be modified, but the program to support students in their learning path is changed. This is a strong feature of the school. There is a realignment of the program for students, and this is based on the principal's and assistant principal's good knowledge of their students' achievements. Hence flexibility and efficient management are leading to improvements in student academic outcomes.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Bronx High School for Law and Community Service (HS 439)	∅	✓	+
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	