



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice**

**Middle/High School 505**

**244 East 163rd Street**

**Bronx**

**NY 10451**

**Principal: Meisha Ross**

**Dates of review: March 19 – 20, 2007**

**Reviewer: Bruce Berry**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice is an empowerment middle/high school with 576 students in grades 7 to 12. The ethnic breakdown is 56% Hispanic, 39% Black, 5% others. There are 3.8% English language learners and 6.6% special education students, both of which are below the proportions in similar and City schools.

The school receives Title I funding. The attendance figure in 2005 was 85.8%, below that of similar (86.4%) and City (87.4%) schools. The figure improved to 86.3% in 2006 and attendance for this academic year is 88.7% to date. The school has a focus on law, government and justice and shares the campus with the criminal court complex.

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

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's good leadership and management are having a positive impact on improving achievement.
- The cabinet works well in engaging and empowering teachers to deliver the continuous improvement vision.
- The school uses data well in assessing the progress of individual and groups of students.
- Teachers work well in teams to develop curriculum, instructional practice, student progress and intervention planning.
- The school has a caring family culture where students and teachers share high expectations.
- Parents and students have a high regard for the work of the school and the educational and social opportunities available for the students.
- The school is an orderly community where procedures are known and followed by all.
- There are good procedures for attendance which are bringing about improvement.
- The focus of the school on law, government and justice provides unique opportunities for students to enhance their knowledge and experience.
- The partnerships the school has developed with external organizations provide enrichment and enhancement of students' academic and social wellbeing.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop the marking policy to achieve consistency in its application across the curriculum.
- Develop subject based moderation of internal assessment practice for credit accumulation to ensure consistency at all levels.
- Continue to develop a range of differentiation practices to ensure that all students are fully engaged and challenged at all times.
- Refine systems to identify the impact on progress of the areas identified in the individual education plans for special education students.
- Continue to develop the use of the new data system to enhance the progress monitoring and goal setting for students.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

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

The principal has a clear vision and appropriate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development required for continuous improvement. Her good leadership and management are having a positive impact on improving achievement. There is a caring, student centered culture in the school and students and teachers have high expectations. As an empowerment school it is developing the use of periodic data to enhance the progress monitoring and goal setting for students. The school regularly reviews student progress and parents are kept fully informed. Attendance rates have improved this year. The key improvements outlined are to further develop marking, moderation of student work and differentiation within instructional practice. Parents and students have a high regard for the work of the school and the educational and social opportunities available for the students. The focus on law, government and justice provides opportunities for the students to meet, be mentored by and work with professionals in the legal system. Other partnerships also provide academic, social and cultural opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and experience.

### 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 data well in assessing the progress of individual and groups of students. Various data sources provide tracking of progress for individual students, classrooms and grades. Progress is monitored using internal assessments and in the middle school intervention programs are planned for all students at level 1 or low level 2, with extended work for students on high level 2 and level 3. At high school level students are tracked in credit accumulation and progress towards Regents tests. Data is collected regularly and is analyzed by student, classroom, grade, teacher and school. Conversations are held with teachers in respect of the data outcomes and this informs future planning and interventions. As an empowerment school, it is beginning to develop the use of the periodic data to enhance progress monitoring and goal setting for students.

Good procedures exist for monitoring the progress of English language learners. The specialist teacher and coach develop the curriculum and instruction for daily sessions by tracking progress through effective assessment processes. There are satisfactory procedures for monitoring the progress of special education students. A special education team plans curriculum and instruction and oversees the progress of the students. Individual education plans are reviewed annually with parents. The impact on progress of the individual education plans is not reviewed at regular enough intervals to ensure that progress is being maintained. The school monitors progress of different ethnic groups through the systems in place for tracking individual student progress and is looking to refine their tracking to include different nationality groups. Honors classes and advanced placement classes provide appropriate challenge and experience for the higher performing

students. The school has recognized that boys are underperforming and have been investigating and trialing strategies which are beginning to improve their engagement and progress. The social group team oversees students with major social issues. The group monitors progress, plans interventions and provides wrap-around care to provide other services relevant to the students' needs.

Comparisons are made with other schools and with the schools own past performance, as well as between classes, grades and subjects. The school uses the outcomes of tests to plan curriculum alignment to address areas identified as in need of improvement.

**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 proficient.**

The school community works collaboratively to establish plans and goals which focus on school improvement at all levels. Plans have clearly defined objectives with timeframes for implementation. The Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's performance review objectives dovetail to give a coherent strategy for improving achievement. The plans and goals include initiatives for improving results in external tests, improving attendance and introducing new initiatives across the school. Goals and plans have a whole school focus, but have an impact at every level. Regular monitoring of the impact of plans takes place at student, classroom, grade and school level. At grade level, 'kid-talk' conferences occur regularly, with the focus on 'how to help the student do better'. Particular attention is given to improving the performance of students in greatest need of improvement. Data is analyzed on progress and behavior, as well as on interventions planned, such as after school classes and counseling.

Parents and students have a high regard for the work of the school and the educational and social opportunities available for the students. The school has a caring family culture where students and teachers share high expectations. Parents are given regular feedback on progress at the end of and between each marking period. Parent and teacher conferences are held and parents are able to communicate with teachers at any time to discuss academic or social issues. All sections of the school community are driven by school improvement and improving student progress. The improvement in attendance is an example of all elements of the school community working together to ensure that plans and goals are achieved.

**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 is aligned to State and Regents' requirements. Curriculum maps are in place in all subjects and the school is establishing consistent curriculum planning from grades 7 through 12 to ensure continuity as students move through the school. Data is generated and analyzed to track the progress of students, classes, grades and across the school. It is also used to make specific curriculum decisions such as the establishment of a global history group in grade 9, as 30% of students passed US history in grade 8. There is

a stand alone curriculum period for law, government and justice. This provides good academic and possible career enhancing opportunities for students, as well as providing external contacts with professionals from the legal profession for mentoring and internships.

Teachers are held accountable for student progress and improving instruction. The outcomes of data underpin conversations with teachers about individual and class progress. There is appropriate planning and structure to instructional practice which provides pace and activities which engage and impact positively on student achievement. However, differentiation practices are not yet consistent enough to ensure that all students are fully challenged and engaged at the correct level at all times. The marking policy is not consistently applied across the curriculum, but the school plans to review the application of the policy and ensure consistency at all levels by developing subject based moderation of internal assessments for credit accumulation. Budget, staffing and scheduling decisions are based on the outcomes of data and the review of school plans and goals.

The school has a very caring culture where students and teachers demonstrate a high level of respect for one another. The advisory program provides a key relationship between a teacher and a student, in which the student's academic and social wellbeing are monitored regularly. There are good procedures for attendance which are bringing about improvement. Students register using an electronic swipe card system and attendance is checked again later. The school contacts home by phone or e-mail and home visits or parent conferences take place if there is a major attendance concern.

**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, with well-developed features.**

The school has appropriate procedures for selecting staff and uses all available sources for appointing teachers to the school. The appointments committee oversees a variety of activities including a school visit, group session activity for candidates and undertaking a model instruction session. Formal interviews include their knowledge of instruction practices and ability to use data to track student progress.

There is appropriate provision for professional development in the school. Teachers volunteer to work on one of four development groups covering co-operative learning, use of technology, rubric development and writing across the curriculum. Each group reports to the faculty at regular intervals and will be the professional developers for other staff as the initiatives are rolled out across the school. Other professional development activities focus on subject areas and the curriculum implications of the outputs from data analysis.

The principal and the assistant principals make formal and informal observations of instruction practice. They use a common format for written feedback, giving a good analysis of strengths and areas for development. They hold individual conversations with teachers, which provide good opportunities to reflect on practice. The cabinet works well in engaging and empowering teachers to deliver the continuous improvement vision. Teachers work well in teams to develop curriculum, instructional practice, student progress and intervention planning. The four professional development teams provide opportunities for teachers to have ownership of the development and for teachers to grow professionally. Grade and subject teams meet regularly and use the outcomes of data analysis to track student progress and plan interventions.

The principal has the respect of all the school community. Parents and students praise her accessibility and the care she has for students. The principal's leadership has brought about good improvement in achievement and she has the capacity to effect change to make further improvement. The school is an orderly community where procedures are known and followed by all. The environment is enhanced by displays to celebrate student work and students take pride in their school.

The partnerships developed with external organizations provide enrichment and enhancement of students' academic and social wellbeing. The focus of the school on law, government and justice provides unique opportunities for students to enhance their knowledge and experience. Partnerships with law firms, law schools and criminal courts are giving students mentoring and internship opportunities.

**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 principal's good leadership and management are having a positive impact on improving achievement. The Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's performance review have appropriate plans and interim goals. Diagnostic assessments at mid-marking and the end of marking period provide interim progress at student, class, grade, teacher and school level. Conversations with teachers lead to analysis of progress of plans and determine realignment and modification of plans, curriculum and interventions to improve student achievement.

The school's planning cycle includes all members of the school community in preparing plans and goals for the year. Each successive phase of planning builds appropriately on a secure evaluation of previous plans. Action plans are created in the Comprehensive Education Plan, and the principal's performance review objectives are suitably aligned with them. Plans and goals are monitored and reviewed regularly and any realignment decisions made are suitably based on the outcomes of interim data.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice (MS/HS 505)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		<b>X</b>	
<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>		<b>X</b>	
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>	<b>X</b>		
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>		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		<b>X</b>	

\* 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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		<b>X</b>	

<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	