



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Bronx Theatre High School**

**High School 546**

**99 Terrace View Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10463**

**Principal: Ms. Deborah Effinger**

**Dates of review: March 7 - 8, 2007**

**Reviewer: Mike Sutton**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The school is situated in the south west of the Bronx just north of the Harlem River and opened in September 2003. The students come mainly from the local area but a small minority travel large distances across the city. There are 361 students enrolled from grade 9 through grade 12, and nearly twice as many males as females. Of those enrolled 59% are Hispanic, 34% are Black, 4% White and 3% Asian. Although many students speak Spanish as a first language, only 18 students are at early stages of learning English. Special education students comprise around 5% of the school's population.

Three quarters of the pupils receive Title one funding which is significantly higher than for similar schools and City-wide schools. A small but significant number of students are admitted or leave midway during the school year. Attendance, at 83% is better than similar schools but a little below the average for City schools.

The school is located in the same building as four other schools. It shares students' bathrooms and some teaching spaces with one of those schools.

In September 2006, the school opted to become 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.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Through strong leadership from the principal, the school has developed very well since it opened.
- There is an excellent climate for learning with very positive relations at all levels.
- The school has high expectations and sets challenging but achievable goals for its students.
- The school has designed a coherent, well thought-out curriculum which integrates its arts and academic programs very effectively.
- It makes full use of the arts program to enhance learning in academic subjects, and vice versa.
- The school is making increasingly good use of data, to identify as early as possible, those students who are in danger of slipping behind.
- There are strong and effective intervention strategies to help those students who need academic or social and emotional support.
- Work in the classrooms engages students fully and results in high levels of involvement, concentration and good behavior.
- The school makes astute use of its budget and schedules staff and students to make the best use of the space and expertise available.
- The school is making very good use of the opportunities provided through being an empowerment school to improve instruction.

### What the school needs to improve

- The teachers' understanding of information revealed through analysis of students' performance data and their knowledge of the school's targets for overall improvement are not as secure as at senior leadership levels.
- Team meetings lack consistency in the rigor with which new data on student achievement is discussed and records of decisions and actions are kept.
- Continue to develop the curriculum where new information shows this is needed and further refine the skills of teaching, particularly techniques of questioning.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with well-developed features.**

Since it opened, the school has made very good progress. Under the authoritative leadership of the principal it has a clear, well-constructed philosophy. Its academic program is set well to the fore, with a coherent and powerful theatrical and artistic dimension. The teachers skillfully weave both aspects together. This approach is making strong contributions to the students' personal and social development and to their academic progress.

The school has robust systems to gather and use data on students' progress. This is very well used to determine who needs help and how best this can be provided. The analysis is used very well to adjust scheduling of classes and teachers. Much of the collation and analysis of data happens at senior levels in the school. As the school approaches its first graduation year, and more data is available, there are increasing staff professional development needs to be addressed. In particular the teachers' understanding of what the data reveals, and particularly with reference to gender groups, is not as secure as it is at senior leadership levels.

The quality of teaching is good and this shows through in the degree of challenge for students in lessons and in their very positive responses. As a result, behavior is good overall. Relations between students and with their teachers are mature, friendly and relaxed. Overall, the teachers plan well, have good subject knowledge and have a strong enthusiasm for their disciplines. A common area to be improved upon is their technique in using questions to involve more students in discussion.

The high quality leadership of the school is the fundamental reason it has evolved so well in a short time. Clear systems and procedures coupled with a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement mean that development planning is precise and accurate. The curriculum, staffing structure and scheduling are all based on careful consideration of data and driven by students' needs. The budget is managed very well and the school has made very good use of opportunities afforded by empowerment status to make adjustments to responsibilities and to engage in useful research to improve teaching and learning. The team responsible for assuring that students who need help get it is very well organized and highly effective. Department teams have a close focus on their subjects but are less involved in driving forward whole school matters.

### 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 gathers a wide range of data on students' progress from teachers' periodic assessments and from the commercial assessment package which the school uses. The data show the performance of students, individually and at each subject and grade. The

school also gathers comprehensive data on students' prior achievements at middle and elementary school. This provides valuable additional information such as pre-existing individual attendance or intervention issues of which the school needs to be aware. Using this information, the school gains a very thorough overview of the strengths and weaknesses of each new student and cohort and plans accordingly.

The teachers know their students very well and nobody struggles along unnoticed. Prompt referral to the Pupil Personnel Team ensures that any problems are considered as early as possible. Intervention is carefully monitored for impact on students' learning.

A lot of data analysis is relatively recent as new information has been provided. The school has not fully assured the skills of analysis down to individual teacher level. The school has a very good picture of the performance of individuals but there is no clear aggregated picture to support its subjective view that there is little difference in the performance between genders. Given the gender imbalance in the school, this is an important area of analysis that is missing.

Good use is being made of recent data analysis to show the projected outcome for different cohorts and subjects against Regents Examination requirements. This information coupled with the school's own data, forms a powerful tool for it to use in helping students catch up on missed credits.

The school will not be in a position to make full comparisons against similar schools until its first cohort graduates and results are known. However, it is well placed to do so when the opportunity arises because its own data collecting systems are in good shape.

Particularly good use has been made of data by a small team of staff engaged, with support from the Empowerment Consortium, on research into the impact of specific teaching strategies on the performance of under-achieving students. The outcome has been a significant, quantifiable improvement for those students and important information for teachers on how to make improvements to students' learning through small adjustments to their teaching.

**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.**

There has been a strong drive in the school's first few years to establish systems for using data and to create plans and set goals. The data gathered from students' achievement records prior to them joining the school is used very well to determine which individuals and which subjects are likely to need most support. The right measures are then put in place to meet students' needs. This process has involved senior leaders largely and there is scope for leaders at department level to take a greater share of responsibility for this analysis, development planning and review.

The school keeps accurate records of students' successes in gaining credits towards graduation. These are tracked well across the cohorts and a careful check kept on the progress of cohorts overall. The information is also used well to target specific individuals for support and if necessary, additional work or summer school to ensure they make up

any lost ground. The team responsible for this work is very effective and the right support and help is made available quickly.

The information on students' progress during the school's first few years has enabled the school to make clear, strategic decisions about staffing. The school's overarching development plan makes good use of the data gathered to lay down realistic but demanding targets against a set timeframe.

The school sets high expectations for what students can accomplish. The challenge set in their work in all aspects of dramatic productions is particularly demanding. This level of demand permeates other areas of the curriculum. The students know the goals that are set for them individually.

**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 has assembled a curriculum which meets equally well the mandated requirements and the over-arching aims and philosophy of the school. There are good medium and longer term curriculum maps for each academic subject and arts theme. The broad range of theatre skills is integrated well and teachers are adept at using skills in one area to develop another. For example, the curriculum is planned so that students put on a performance of a Greek tragedy play in parallel with studying ancient times in history. Or English teachers make use of students' drama skills to perform short cameos to illustrate particular literary techniques. Similar strategies have been used to good effect in other subjects. As one student said, 'In an exam, when I get stuck I think back to the way we used drama to explain the concept and it helps me remember it again'. The breadth of the theatre and artistic disciplines that is taught helps draw out hidden talents amongst students, such as the student who found he had a particular skill for costume design.

Budgeting and staffing decisions are also heavily steered by the overall aims of the school and what the data on students' performance shows. To give the arts a fuller status in line with planning, money was set aside for a dance floor to be laid in one room. The paramount needs to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills as shown by the data gathered when they start at the school, lead to the hiring of English and mathematics coaches and adjustments to the scheduling for classes and teachers. This provides greater strategic subject input to professional development and a more ready, daily source of advice and guidance to teachers.

Teachers have a strong drive to ensure their students achieve as well as they can. Lessons are imaginative and the content captures the students' interests as for example in the social studies lesson where students were asked to consider the imagery used in an ancient world map as part of their work on the Crusades. Their levels of concentration were high and strong demands made on their thinking. Because the lessons are interesting, the students respond very well with attention, good behavior and mature attitudes to their work and to one another.

The quality of teaching is generally good but a consistent weakness is in the quality of questioning. The teachers frequently accept answers only from those who volunteer or from the most vociferous respondents. More quiet or reticent members of the class often

just listen and teachers miss opportunities to draw them into the discussions through directly targeted questions.

The teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding and their students' needs. Much is gained from regular assessments of their work but also from the regular contact they have with students over the course of time. Students who slip behind are quickly identified. As one student put it, 'They quickly spot if something is wrong from your mood or behavior and check if everything is OK'. The students feel strongly that they have an adult to turn to in school if they have a problem.

Attendance for the great majority of students is very good. Overall, attendance is a bit better than for similar schools but not quite as good as the average for all City schools. There are clear, well-followed procedures to identify and address particular problems.

**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.**

Staff are selected on their understanding and commitment to the multi-disciplinary aims of the school and on their abilities to work flexibly in a small team. Strategic decisions have been made in hiring staff with abilities to understand and handle data as well as in fine tuning the curriculum, such as in the range of second languages offered. This combination has proved very effective during the school's first years. Data handling and analysis by the assistant principal in particular is giving the school a deeper insight into its performance.

Professional development has been re-aligned as the school has developed. The coaches now play a greater role in both day to day informal advice and in providing specific professional development. The direction of curriculum development is still largely determined by the up-coming elements of the syllabus. The assessment data coming on stream as the school grows increasingly highlights weaknesses in the curriculum that need further attention. Departmental leaders have yet to use this fully, or information from classroom observations by senior staff, in planning professional development.

The principal uses appropriate formal and many informal observations to gauge the quality of teaching. She has a very accurate view of the overall and particular strengths in teaching and the areas for improvement. Appropriate strategies are used to bring about improvements where most needed. There are opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other but more professional development is needed on how to evaluate what is observed. Teachers make accurate self evaluations following lessons and have a clear idea of what could be done better next time.

Planning of various curriculum elements is managed well by departmental leaders who have innovative ideas to make lessons and teaching interesting and engaging for the students. However, departmental meetings are relatively informal and records of decisions and actions are not kept clearly enough. These meetings do not give sufficient attention to overall school strategic development because data on whole school performance is not shared or understood sufficiently at this level.

The principal has great respect amongst parents, students and staff. The way in which she has engineered such a successful start to the school and her clear views on what needs to be done next suggests very cogently that there is high capacity to improve

further. Hard working office staff ensure that day-to-day routines run very smoothly. Procedures are clear and effective. The school makes excellent use of a wide range of outside organizations to support its work. From agencies that provide specific help for individuals to arts and theatre groups who make strong links with the school and students. Visits to the community and visitors in from the community add a further positive dimension to the school's work.

**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 well developed.**

The school has clear plans for the future. These start from a good understanding of where the students are at, as shown by the data. The way in which the school uses data about incoming students' existing achievements to structure classes and the curriculum is exemplary. Through carefully evaluation of what is most needed, the Comprehensive Education Plan sets out goals for students' achievement which are attainable yet challenging.

The school has a good understanding at senior levels, of the performance across grades and subjects. These show where there are potential emerging concerns and the plans address these well.

The school has plans to make fine-tuned adjustments to the curriculum and class structures next year based on emerging evidence of students' performance. It knows how it needs to modify existing plans within the arts courses and how to make better use of what is already in place. The school is not complacent and is driven forward by the principal. It is very well placed to develop further. Other senior leaders play a crucial role in this but the need is there for departments to be closer involved in implementing strategic changes and developments.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Bronx Theatre High School (HS 546)</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>	Ø	✓	+
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>	Ø	✓	+
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>	Ø	✓	+
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