



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Monroe Academy for Business and Law

High School 690

**1300 Boynton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10472**

Principal: Benito Herrero

Dates of review: October 30 – 31, 2006

Reviewer: Joy Stopher

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

Monroe Academy for Business and Law is one of the five new schools formed in 1994 from the redesign of James Monroe High School in the Bronx and provides a comprehensive high school education. In addition to the focus on business and law, after school programs are available for students who need additional support both in credit bearing classes and in test preparation. A variety of extracurricular activities are available through the Mission Society.

There are currently 609 students enrolled, 60% Hispanic, 39% Black and 1% other. Almost 13% are special education students and 11% are English language learners. The percentage of students who are eligible for Title 1 is 76%, which is higher than other schools in New York City. Student attendance has remained below 80% for the last four years. This is below average compared to other City schools.

The school provides a variety of courses which supports students' introduction to the worlds of business and law.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The student graduation rate has shown significant improvement in recent years.
- The culture of the school is improving and good attention is given to safety and security.
- The principal is hard-working and committed to student achievement.
- Most adults treat students with respect.
- The guidance counselors provide good support for students.
- There is a good range of different programs to enhance learning and progress.
- Good use is made of grade level data to check student progress.
- The level of resource has grown, particularly in technology.
- Parents are well informed about their child's progress.
- The leadership program is providing opportunities to broaden students' experiences.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop the range of strategies used to improve attendance.
- Use individual student data to inform instruction and lesson planning.
- Engaging students with more interactive activity.
- Provide more opportunities for collaborative planning and for teachers to observe each other.
- Deliver and evaluate a comprehensive program of professional development matched to individual and whole-school needs.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by ensuring there is sufficient administration to give adequate time to planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is an undeveloped school with many proficient features.

Monroe Academy for Business and Law is an improving school committed to raising the level of student achievement. Over the last few years it has moved steadily towards achieving its goals and is well placed to make the necessary improvements in order to become a proficient school.

Student graduation rates have risen from 39% in 2004 to just over 60% in 2006. Performance has improved and students are getting higher scores in standardized tests. The performance of special education students has also improved. This has been brought about by the rigorous involvement of the principal in analyzing grade level data and in communicating his high expectations to students and staff. This has demanded a lot of his time and leadership of the school is currently too unevenly distributed to enable a focused approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation.

There are three effective guidance counselors who give individual support to students and monitor progress. The English department has introduced the 'Ramp-Up to Advanced Literacy' program and this has been effective in raising the awareness of students' academic needs and ensuring that teachers plan work which is matched to students' ability. There is now recognition that the analysis of data does not sufficiently drive instruction and that the good practice which has begun in English has yet to be spread throughout the school. Engaging students by using a variety of teaching and learning methods and involving them in taking more responsibility by developing the role of the school council, is also underdeveloped.

The school is overenrolled and this has resulted in large class sizes. There are a number of organizational issues arising from sharing the site with other schools.

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 has gathered a comprehensive range of data and uses it to analyze the performance of specific grades. Assessments are made during enrollment, particularly for 9th graders, and are used to ensure effective initial classroom placements. Analysis of grade level data is used in a similar way. The principal and guidance counselors have regular meetings to discuss student progress and to examine the latest data in order to inform decisions about appropriate classes and when transfers need to take place. The improvements in performance have been largely brought about by the successful interpretation of data to ensure that students know what they need to do to improve. Teachers are given this information at the beginning of each school year but, as yet, it is

not systematically used to inform instruction. Similarly the detailed individual student data contained on the data tool needs further interpretation and dissemination in order for it to be fully effective in improving student progress. The school has been successful in measuring its overall performance in relation to past performance but has yet to compare this with similar schools. It also recognizes that insufficient time is currently devoted to the analysis of data and discussion of individual student, class and grade level 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 undeveloped with proficient features.

The culture of the school has improved significantly in recent times and the staff work well together in trying to improve the performance of students, particularly those who have the greatest need. Guidance counselors offer very good support to this group of students, analyzing the varying reasons why these students are underperforming and then setting up programs to help them succeed. Successful strategies have included counseling for socialization and persuading students to attend summer school.

Whole school goals are centered on raising the overall achievement of students and given that almost 90% of students enter below grade level, the school has been successful in this aim. Teachers feel they are involved in the decision making processes and are willing to support each other and share ideas, for example in promoting better classroom management. Parents too are well informed.

Opportunities for collaborative planning, other than on an informal basis, are very limited. However, some departments are beginning to examine ways in which this can be achieved. The use of data to inform immediate improvement i.e. at classroom level is underdeveloped. The principal takes a leading role in analyzing and interpreting data but this is not shared more widely so that teachers can plan effectively for individual students.

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 undeveloped with proficient features.

The curriculum has been well aligned to the needs of the students. Ninety percent of students enter the school below grade level and a high proportion of them do not meet the standard expectations. A good range of different programs have been introduced which enhance students’ learning and progress. Classes have been designed to meet the needs of students and contain specific programs to address deficiencies, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The school has correctly identified that its response in reacting to the evaluation of data is not always as speedy as it might be. There are good opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities and sports. The leadership program is valued by students and provides a good basis for high achievers to broaden their knowledge and experience.

Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes in regard to the Regent tests and other State tests as the grade level data identifies what needs to be

improved. Lesson planning is left to the individual teachers and lacks consistency of practice across subjects and grades. Individual student data is not systematically used to inform instruction. As a result, differentiation is not a common practice other than in an informal way. This results in some students being disengaged because they are unable to make sufficient progress. For some, this impacts adversely on their attendance. There are too few opportunities for interactive learning. Some teachers, however, make good use of the improved resources for technology. The budget has been used wisely to build up the level of resource and to support the effective work of the guidance counselors.

Most adults treat students with respect and the good attention paid to safety and security is providing an improved environment for learning. Student attendance is recognized to be important but has been consistently below 80%. Procedures for contacting parents and analyzing the reasons for absence are not always systematically addressed.

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 undeveloped with proficient features.

School leaders have high expectations and are constantly seeking to appoint staff who can demonstrate enthusiasm, a solid background and a willingness to learn, particularly in regard to working collaboratively and making the best use of data. The school has recognized that there is a scarcity of candidates in special education and that its size means that it may have insufficient breadth of expertise to deal with the full range of special education students.

Professional development has been traditionally identified by faculty needs and also driven by initiatives from the regional office. Current priorities are English language learner instruction, the use of data, differentiation, special education and classroom management. As yet, the plans for professional development are not rooted in the results of observation nor tailored specifically to meet the needs of the school. The principal and other teachers do observe classes but they are behind schedule with their program and there are too few opportunities for staff to observe each other. Access to subject-based support is limited. The current accommodation, which is shared with four other schools, is a further barrier to the ease with which colleagues can collaborate and share good practice.

The principal is well respected by staff and parents and his enthusiasm and hard work are very much appreciated. Many staff feel empowered by his leadership style and there is a general acknowledgement that the school has moved forward under his leadership. He plays a significant role in ensuring the smooth day to day running of the school. Good partnerships have been established with a variety of organizations and have been used to support the school in achieving its academic goals. These organizations include the Mission Society, Counseling in Schools, Junior Achievement, the Bronx Community College and private companies who provide internship opportunities for students.

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

This area of the school's work is undeveloped with proficient features.

The school effectively monitors mid term results and includes the formulation of goals and diagnostic assessments. Data is monitored periodically and is reviewed in depth mid year and at the end of the year. Appropriate changes in instructional programs are made when necessary. There are insufficient grade level meetings to moderate grade and class data. Regular monitoring and revision of other data such as student engagement, attendance strategies and professional development is not used as a basis to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the school.

Much good work in the area of monitoring and revision does happen but tends to be on an informal basis, dependent upon the conscientiousness and care of individuals. The principal and other senior leaders drive the strategic decisions but systems for integrating this into classroom practice are undeveloped. The ill-health absence of the assistant principal has raised the awareness of how effective her contribution is and students are particularly appreciative of the care and professionalism she demonstrates. The principal works very hard and is committed to raising student achievement. However, he is constantly diverted from his strategic role into ensuring the school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. Budgetary decisions have been made on the basis of improving the level of resource and this has had a positive impact. The recruitment of an additional assistant principal is being given appropriate consideration. The current demands on senior staff are resulting in inadequate time being given to planning, monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Monroe Academy for Business and Law	∅	✓	+
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		